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AMONG THE PRIMITIVE BAKONGO







*Photo by*

### A BATEKE CHIEF

*Rev. A. Billington*

The Bateke tribe occupies a part of Stanley Pool. This chief has a cowrie shell hat on his head, a brass collar round his neck, a whisk of buffalo hair in his hand—a kind of sceptre with which he emphasizes the important points in his talk, and is sitting on a leopard's skin which only chiefs may use. In front is a common china ornament he has bought at a trading house.



# AMONG THE PRIMITIVE BAKONGO

A RECORD OF THIRTY YEARS' CLOSE INTERCOURSE  
WITH THE BAKONGO AND OTHER TRIBES OF  
EQUATORIAL AFRICA, WITH A DESCRIPTION  
OF THEIR HABITS, CUSTOMS  
& RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

BY ✓

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With 40 Illustrations & a Map

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## PREFACE

THE kindly reception given to a former work, *Among Congo Cannibals*, has encouraged the author to put in permanent form this record of the customs, habits, organisations, court life and its functionaries, which he has carefully noted during the thirty years that he has been more or less closely in touch with the peoples of the Lower Congo.

The former work deals with a Riverine Tribe on the Upper Congo River; but this book aims at giving a reflection of the Lower Congo native's mind, a series of word photographs of his manner of life, his views regarding the various spirits by which he is surrounded and his method of controlling them; and also reminiscences of the old King, who for thirty-two years reigned nominally over an extent of territory larger than Wales, but in reality only over a stretch of country the size of a small English county. The language spoken, Kisi-Kongo, at the capital, San Salvador, is known, with slight dialectical differences, throughout the whole of the nominal kingdom of Kongo, and in some parts even beyond its boundaries, and the people are designated Bakongo.

The customs, &c., here described are in vogue over the whole of the Lower Congo, having regard, of course, to local colouring and conditions, *e.g.* the ingredients employed to make a charm in one place may not all be found in another locality, so they are replaced by other things; and in one part of the country where gunpowder is easily procurable, and being mysterious in its action, it is largely used to rouse their

fetishes to activity, whereas in another part, where gunpowder is difficult to obtain, and consequently very expensive, the rattle and whistle, used vigorously, are employed as substitutes, while in other districts both gunpowder and whistles enter largely into their ritual. Again, in the sixteenth century the Portuguese Roman Catholics were dominant in San Salvador and its neighbourhood, and as a result in that district the cross (*ekuluzu*) is now often used as a charm, and the sign of the cross, made by the naked finger or with a piece of chalk, is frequently employed in the ceremonies of some cults of fetish men.

The writer has no particular leaning towards any school of anthropologists, and has not written in support of any party. He noted down his observations of native manners, &c., from sheer interest in the people amongst whom his life was cast, and from an earnest desire to understand them, their outlook on life, their thoughts respecting their environments, and their ideas of a future state; and what he has seen and learned he has tried to put in clear, terse language before his readers.

These pages are not a record of missionary incidents, but an account of native life in all its various complex stages from before birth to after death—the native's work, fights, hunts, dances, games, stories, and loves; the diseases to which he is subject, the spirits he must cajole, and the struggles he encounters through life.

The writer trusts that the non-specialist will find in these pages such information as will help him to a fuller, and hence a juster, knowledge of the black man in his native life and home; and the anthropologist will find the facts with which to weave his theories of the human race.

The author is much indebted to the Council of the Folk Lore Society for permission to use the articles contributed by him to their Quarterly Reviews; and to the editor of *The Treasury* for a similar kindness respecting an article of his—an African River, that appeared in that magazine. His best



## PREFACE

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thanks are also due to his colleagues, Revs. F. Oldrieve, W. Wooding, T. Lewis, R. H. C. Graham, S. Bowskill, and Dr. Mercier Gamble for their kind permission to use the photographs bearing their names; and to Miss Hartland, Rev. J. L. Forfeitt, and Sir H. H. Johnston, G.C.M.G., for so willingly placing their collections of photographs at his service.

JOHN H. WEEKS.



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# AMONG THE PRIMITIVE BAKONGO

## CHAPTER I

### MY FIRST TRIP ON THE CONGO RIVER

ON the 13th of January 1882 the s.s. *Kinsembo* steamed round Banana Point, and with much rattling of chains dropped her anchor in the brackish waters of Banana Creek. On the port side of our vessel was Banana—a narrow strip of sand gently lapped on the inner side by the tired waters that had travelled hundreds of weary miles from the far interior of Africa, here rushing impetuously over falls, there madly racing with “white horses” through the rapids; here pushing their frothy, fuming way among the boulders and rocks that frequently, in the cataract regions, tried to impede their onward haste to the sea, and there purring by a shelving bank in a quiet bay or gurgling, like a happy child, over the pebbly shallows; but with it all ever hurrying of set purpose to the ocean. No wonder they were weary after their toilsome journey, and turned into the creek for a rest before renewing their travels on the bosom of the mighty Atlantic.

Away to the stern of our steamer was the main current of the great river and its many full-grown tributaries sweeping with reddish-brown waters to the sea. The current by its volume and force discoloured the sea for over eighty miles from the river’s mouth, and when the tide turned it scarcely affected the onward rush of the river’s course.

The spit of sand forming Banana was long and low, and was occupied as a receiving and distributing centre by several

trading houses that had their factories up the river and its numerous creeks, and stretching north and south along the sea coast. At that time the most powerful of these houses was the "Dutch House," at whose table over fifty white men sat daily, and whose coloured employes reached well into four figures. From the deck of the steamer we could look over the various houses and stores and see the Atlantic waves rolling up the low, shelving beach, so that Banana with its white roofs, its frangipanis, its oleanders, its maracujas, its low green shrubs, and its graceful cocoa-nut palms seemed, in its bright, sunlit beauty, to be sitting on the water. A pretty sight from the steamer, and all the more beautiful to us as for seven weeks we had been looking towards it as the object of our desires, and the starting-point of our African life and experiences.

Not long after the anchor dropped, my old college friend, Mr. Billington, came on board and offered me a passage in his mission launch, the *Livingstone*, as far as our station at Musuku. The launch was not to start for a few days, but he invited me to stay with him at the mission-house until all was ready. I had been wondering how I was to reach Musuku, situated about 90 miles up the river, so I gladly accepted the proffered help.

The *Livingstone* was a small steam launch about 50 feet long, 5 feet wide, and of very shallow draught. When she was fully laden with cargo for up-river stations, and supplied with coals and provisions for the journey, there was not much room to spare for the two white men who worked her, and the unfortunate passenger who in his ignorance had accepted a passage by her to his station. Through the comparatively quiet waters of Banana Creek the little launch made her way with holiday gaiety; Bula Mbemba Point was rounded, and then came the struggle for every foot of the way. Whatever speed the *Livingstone* may have had on the Thames she lost it on the Congo, for in spite of her fussing and fuming, and the racing of her noisy engines, it was sunset before we reached Ponta de Lenha, a factory about 20 miles from Banana.

By the afternoon of the second day we steamed into Boma, and enjoyed the hospitality of a French trading house. We were not sorry to stretch our legs on the short, wide road that ran by the river. The three of us who formed the passenger and crew of the launch more than crowded her carrying capacity. Where we sat down in the morning there we had to remain until we arrived at our stopping-place, for if we moved too freely, or changed our position too carelessly, the little steamer rocked ominously, and warned us of possible consequences. Every movement had to be well calculated, and when it was necessary for one to approach the provision box, or crawl along to a bit of engine beyond the engineer's reach from his seat, another of us had to watch his movements and counteract his weight when the steamer wobbled. Just imagine sitting abaft the engines—the only place there was for accommodation—with the heat from them coming full in your face, the tropical sun pouring down its fierce rays on and penetrating through the thin awning above, and the water reflecting the heat on either side! We had all the discomforts and none of the pleasures of a prolonged Turkish bath.

On leaving Boma on the third morning out from Banana we fully anticipated arriving at Musuku in the early afternoon. But we had not gone many miles when "crack" went a bolt in the engine, and our little launch began to rock dangerously in the turbulent waters. We were negotiating a swiftly-running stretch of river, and the engineer, in trying to get more speed out of the engines, had overstrained them, with the result that a bolt gave way, and our little craft was turned about and carried down-river like a cork on the waves. At the right moment an anchor was thrown out, which gripped the rocky bottom and saved us from a catastrophe.

Ransacking among the spare gear, the only bolt we could find was too large to fit into the place, so we took turn about in the broiling heat to file that bolt to a proper size. And all the time the launch was tugging at her anchor chain fit to snap it, and rocking and rolling in the treacherous current as though she would like to turn and lay for ever on her side at

the bottom of the river, where engineers cease from troubling and weary steamers are at rest.

As soon as possible we were again on our way up-river, the little launch fighting bravely for every inch of progress; and the giant, swirling, rushing current sometimes held her so tightly in its grip that she could not force her way round some jutting point that seemed exposed to the whole weight of the river. She would then cut across the river to the other side, where she would humbly creep up the quiet water, apologetically take advantage of any up-current, and, coming in time to another strong corner, she would remember her past experiences, and instead of fighting the strong water she would cross the river in search of less turbulent foes on the other side; and thus for many a mile she worked her way modestly, but with much fretting and wheezing, up the great river that in after years was to play with ocean steamers on her bosom, and in spiteful moods to twirl them round and round like tops.

By the middle of the afternoon we came in sight of Musuku, but between us and our landing-place was a great stretch of water called in the native tongue "angry waters," because of the noise they made in swirling and rushing down, constantly boiling and bubbling, suddenly making whirlpools in unlikely places, that gyrated with great momentum for a time, forming deep and ever-widening holes, and then mysteriously disappearing to reappear in another unexpected place. The one in charge of the steamer decided that, instead of crossing that great cauldron of seething water, it would be wiser to go up a quiet, narrow channel between the mainland and an island, and coming out above the madly whirling waters, cross in a calmer stretch of river, and thus gain our destination without further trouble. But no sooner did we turn up the quiet channel than a rock hidden beneath the water knocked off our propeller; but there was sufficient way on the steamer to take us to the bank, and steering for some trees, we tied up to them as quickly as we touched them.

Between us and Musuku was the island, and we wanted our friends at the station to know of our whereabouts, so at short





*Photo by*

### NATIVE CHIEF, BOMA

*M. Shanu*

The photo was taken twenty-five years ago in a village just behind Boma, which is now the capital of Belgian Congo. Fetishes are carved on the King-post, and around the post is a trench into which palm-wine and blood were poured as an offering to the fetishes on the post. The wide verandah was used for palavers.





intervals we fired our guns and shouted, but as there was no response we decided that our people had not noticed our little launch when she came in sight of the station, and that they probably regarded our guns as the firing of some hippopotami hunters.

Not long before sunset we saw two natives passing in a canoe on the opposite side of the channel in which we were wrecked. We called and beckoned to them, and they came alongside our little steamer and asked us what we wanted.

We replied by asking them if they would take us to Musuku.

"Yes," they answered, "but what will you pay us?"

We said that we would give them eight handkerchiefs, and they, on seeing the bright, gaudy cloth with its grotesque patterns in red, black, yellow, &c., at once agreed to take us; and being eager to handle such handsome pay, cried out:

"Get into our canoe at once, and we will paddle you to Musuku."

Well, that was a feat much easier to talk about than to accomplish by the inexperienced. The canoe was a "dug-out"—simply a tree that had been felled, shaped at the ends, rounded at the sides, and dug out in the middle. It oscillated dangerously, and as we entered the canoe it wobbled so badly that we expected every moment the light craft would turn turtle and precipitate us into the water, so we embarked very gingerly, and when we were seated along the bottom of the canoe, we bade the men to take their paddles.

We had not proceeded more than a few hundred yards from our launch—which we now began to regard with affection, and as a very fortress of security compared to our unsteady canoe—when we saw on the bank ahead of us some five hippopotami making for the river. For two days we had been sitting with our guns to hand on the lookout for these creatures, and had not seen a single one; and when we had no desire to meet them there were five too near to be pleasant. We shouted and made a noise, hoping to frighten them back to the bush, but in sheer hippo obstinacy they continued their course to the river,

and plunged with much grunting and tremendous splashes into the water right in front of their noses, and in front of our canoe. What waves they made! Eight tons of living, reckless flesh churning about in the neighbourhood of a frail bark give the occupants a peculiar flutter about the heart. We expected every moment to be lifted by one of the brutes and thrown headlong into the river. Our men paddled hard to pass quickly the dangerous spot, and as our canoe bounded forward, one hippopotamus came snorting up on one side, and another came snorting up on the other side and stared at us with watery eyes a few fathoms off, but fortunately none came under us or at us, and after more than two hours of hard paddling we were not sorry to hear the bottom of the canoe grate on Musuku beach. The men received their eight handkerchiefs and went off delighted; and we were heartily welcomed by Mr. Crudgington, who had charge of the B.M.S. Station at Musuku. After a day or so the "captain" returned to his steamer, and by the help of a sail and the current the launch returned to Banana.

While at Musuku I had my first taste of malarial fever, the prelude to a very intimate acquaintance with that malady. My temperature on this first occasion rose to 106·4; and the discomforts of the fever, the disagreeable conditions in which I had to bear it, and the nauseating effects of the large doses of quinine that I was compelled to swallow, remain with me to this day. At that time quinine could only be bought loose at 22s. per ounce. There were no tabloids, no coated pills, no ovoid gelatine capsules, nor any other form by which to render it more pleasant to a weak stomach. We tried it in condensed milk, in coffee, in Liebig's Extract, and in cigarette paper, but its bitterness could not be disguised. One inventive genius hit on the expedient of making the powder into pills with tinct. perchloride of iron. He certainly made pills that had no nauseating effect, for they would not dissolve in the stomach; and it was seriously proposed to use the remainder in lieu of shot—they were hard enough.

Musuku had not been occupied many months. The house,

stores, and necessary offices were of bamboo walls and grass roofs. The ground was hard, and unsuitable for kitchen gardens. Huge boulders and stones of various sizes were strewn about the place, reflecting the heat, and rendering path-making almost impossible. The view from the station was magnificent. There in front was a vast stretch of boiling, bubbling, swirling water that narrowed into a channel, at the end of which the hills about Boma could be distinctly seen on a clear day. In the near distance were the high lands on the other side of the river; and looking up-river one could see Diamond Rock standing almost in the middle of the river, and the waters that flowed by a thousand towns in the far interior struck against it, and failing to tear it from its grip, eddied around it, and raging at its vain endeavour, passed on with increased fury. And away as a background to the rock were the hills of Noqui, that ran at such an angle that they appeared to landlock the river and turn it into a great lake; and behind the station were hills that seemed to bar the way to the hinterland, and stand as sentinels over its hidden and fascinating mysteries.

## CHAPTER II

### JOURNEY TO SAN SALVADOR

**I**T was arranged by my colleagues that I should commence my missionary life at San Salvador, the capital of the Kingdom of Kongo, which is situated eighty odd miles south-east of Musuku—about five days' journey. As Mr. Hartland was returning to San Salvador to pack his belongings and settle his accounts prior to working on the main river, it was thought desirable, although I had not fully regained my strength after my first bout with malarial fever, that I should accompany him rather than take the journey alone.

There were no vehicles of any kind on that road, so we had to use on the journey an animal well known as Shanks' pony—a willing steed, but not always equal to the demands made upon it in such a country. There were neither hotels nor restaurants, consequently we had to take with us all the provisions, &c., we needed for the road. In one trunk we packed a few clothes, into another we put rice and tins of provisions, a third we filled with knives, looking-glasses, bells, beads, cloth, &c.—this was our purse, containing the money with which we were to pay our way: for if I had gone into a village and had offered a native woman a sovereign for a fowl she would have said, “Here is a foolish white man offering me a brass button without holes for a fine fowl!” but when we presented a looking-glass or a knife, she was only too delighted to exchange her fowl for either of them, hence the need of taking a box of barter goods with us. We tied our blankets, mosquito curtain, camp-bedstead, and pillows in a bundle and wrapped a waterproof sheet round them to keep the things dry; and in a bath we arranged our pots and pans, our kettle and frying-pan, our knives and forks, cups and saucers, and in fact all the articles

we required for cooking and eating our food. When these and various other loads had been prepared we called the carriers, who, placing them upon their heads or shoulders, started with us on the road to San Salvador.

Now when a road is mentioned in England, we instantly think of a wide place upon which navvies have laboured, and over which steam rollers have passed, making them pleasant for travelling; but when we speak of a road on the Congo we mean a narrow path about eight or ten inches wide, winding like a narrow brownish ribbon in and out of the country, going over the tops of the hills and dipping down into the valleys, and losing itself in the streams and swamps; and the strong tropical rains have poured down on this track, washing the loose dirt out of it, leaving only the stones sticking up. For miles on either side of these narrow roads was tall, stout grass from ten to fifteen feet high, and the playful wind blowing the grass about interlocked it in such a clinging embrace that the traveller had to go with his arms up to force his way, and to keep the grass from cutting his face or poking into his eyes.

More than once I had in my San Salvador journey a strong "Kroo-boy," a part of whose duty it was to carry me over the many streams and swamps that crossed the path. His name was Napoleon Bonaparte. I do not know how he came by the name; but the first time I met him I asked him his name and he replied in "Kroo-boy" English, "My name, Massa, be Napoleon Bonaparte." Sometimes Napoleon would have me upon his shoulders, flying-angel fashion, in the middle of a river, and feeling the rush of water against his legs he would begin to quake and say, "Massa, I no fit for carry you, I go let you fall;" and I would reply, "Napoleon, I fit for give you one cup of rice suppose you no drop me." He would then carefully take a few more paces, and feeling the swirl of water more strongly about his legs, and the stones slipping beneath his feet, he would nervously call out in his curious English, "Massa, Massa, I no fit, I bound for let you fall." Napoleon often received from me the promise of two or three cups of



rice to steady him, before he landed me high and dry upon the further bank. At times we were not so fortunate, then both of us went down into the water, and we congratulated ourselves when it was a stream, and not a nasty, muddy swamp.

After climbing up and down steep hills, pushing through tall, entangled grass, traversing plateaus, and crossing streams, rivers, and swamps for four or five hours with the strong tropical sun pouring down his fierce rays upon us, we were glad to hear that the next village we reached was the place where we were to spend the night. Crossing a stream of sparkling water, and winding through some cassava farms, we entered the village, and our carriers, selecting the largest hut they could see, put down their loads outside of it, and went in search of the owner, and said to him, "We have brought some white men into your village, and their goods are now outside your door; will you lend them your house for the night?"

The native owner was very hospitable, and was quite willing to lend his house to the passing travellers; so calling two or three of his wives he told them to sweep the house and hand it over to us. The woman came with their native-made brooms, and pushing together the rubbish of many days, they carried it away, and after removing their mats, saucepans, and anything else they would require for the night, they told us the hut was ready. A native after he has lent his hut does not care to enter it again until it is properly handed back, and should he need to do so through having forgotten something he asks permission with many apologies. The hut lent was small, but it answered our purpose admirably. In the morning we returned our goods to their various bundles and boxes, leaving out a penny looking-glass and two yards of calico, which we presented to the owner of the house in acknowledgment of his courtesy to us; and he on receiving the articles clapped his hands and made a little speech of thanks—the clapping of the hands was the usual part of the ordinary mode of thanking a person.

I had always read about white men leading their caravans,



*Photo by*

SUSPENSION BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER AMERIZ

*Rev. W. Wooding*

These bridges are made of sticks, canes, and vine ropes; and as the traveller crosses them they sway and creak very ominously. The ascent to, or descent from, the bridge is often more difficult and perilous than the bridge itself.





and being now in a new country I placed myself at the head of the carriers, and pushed forward through the tall grass, which at 5.30 A.M. was heavy with dew, and as I forged through it shaking the grass, the dew fell on me in showers, and soon my helmet and clothes were soaking wet, and the water was quelching in my boots. The Congos have a proverb the translation of which runs thus: "Foolishness comes first and wisdom afterwards." I had learned my lesson, so the next morning, instead of preceding the men, I stayed behind with my colleague until the last carrier had left our night's quarters; and the men thus going first knocked against the grass, shook off the dew, and left behind a comparatively dry road for us. And it made very little difference to the men, for they wore so little cloth that, half an hour after the sun rose above the hill-tops, they were absolutely dry, whereas we, with our superfluity of clothes, would have been more or less damp and uncomfortable most of the day.

After five days of such-like travelling I was glad to have pointed to me from the top of a hill the mission station of San Salvador in the distance. As we approached the town we found that the people had heard of our coming, for they were lining either side of the narrow road to give us a welcome. As we passed up between them they pushed back with their backs the tall grass to make a way for us, and shooting out their hands they gripped ours, saying: "Kaiyisi Mundele! Kaiyisi Mundele!" (Welcome white man! Welcome white man!) We passed quickly between the greeting, excited lines of black folk and entered the mission-house, and the natives came crowding in behind us, and standing on tiptoe and with outstretched necks they peered over one another's shoulders to stare at the new arrival: for a new white man to a central African town is like a circus to an English village—every one turns out to gaze at the sight; and as they stood looking at me they passed remarks on my personal appearance, and selected my physical peculiarities for special attention. There were allusions to my youthful appearance, to my neck and nose, and the absence of a beard, &c. Of course I was unable

to understand them, but my colleagues were only too delighted to give a very literal translation of the observations none too quietly passed by the facetious onlookers.

By and by the crowd parted, and I saw a couple of lads struggling bravely with a pig, which after much trouble they brought to me and said, "The King has heard of the arrival of the new white man, and he does not want him to complain of hunger, so he has sent you this pig to remove your hunger after the long journey."

I looked down ruefully at the squalling, struggling pig, wondering what it was all about; but one of my colleagues translated the speech to me, answered it on my behalf, and accepted the dirty, squeaking animal in my name. I was a Londoner, and had never owned a pig in all my life before, and scarcely knew what to do with such a creature; hence I was not sorry when two of the school lads removed it from the house, and promised to look after it, in the hope of one day eating a fair share of it. Two days after my arrival I went down with another fever, reaching a temperature of  $106\cdot5$ ; but it is not my purpose to record fevers, and let me say once for all that the highest temperature I ever had during my long life on the Congo was  $107\cdot4$ , and I had not the slightest ambition to go higher than that.

Although the road was narrow, rough, and hilly, the swamps disgusting to eyes and nose, the streams numerous and very wet—especially when one fell into them, with all his clothes on, from the shoulders of a tall Kroo-boy—yet I have very pleasant memories of the various journeys I took in the early years over that road. For as I became acquainted with the language I found my personal lads and carriers no mean companions. Their ready sympathy when you fell into a stream; their hearty, good-natured laughter at your and their own mishaps; their genial chatter, the stories they told, the country gossip they recounted, and the conundrums they propounded, all helped to shorten the journey, and smooth the stony road.

A day's journey was from 15 to 20 miles, or from six to eight hours. The usual hour for starting was about 5.30 A.M.,

and by the time we halted for lunch between 11 and 12 A.M. the greater part of the journey for the day was over. What grateful rests they were beneath the pleasant shade of some trees by a gurgling, sparkling stream! Down went the loads with a sigh of relief, and looping their cloths in their belts, the carriers went up-stream, and after carefully washing their hands and mouths, the men stooped and threw the water into their mouths with the fingers of the right hand, or putting their hands together, little finger to little finger, they dipped up the water, and drank it with their lips placed between the thumbs. Some of the carriers would be too exhausted to do more than drop their loads and stretch themselves on the ground, and these would beg for a drink from their stronger comrades—a request never refused, no matter how near or far the stream might be from the encampment.

The town at which a white man and his caravan spent the night was always agog with excitement. There was the bartering for food, the haggling about the price of the cassava, the plantain, or the peanuts offered for sale, and the worth of the trade goods offered in exchange; the interchange of news; but the greatest of all interest to the local natives centred in the newly arrived white man. The inhabitants of the village formed a semi-circle round the front of his borrowed hut, and watched his every movement. He strips off his jacket, turns down the collar round his neck, and rolls up his shirt-sleeves preparatory to a wash; and there are audible remarks about the whiteness of his skin. They eye him critically at his toilet. "What is that stuff he is rubbing on his hands?" asks one ignoramus.

"That," replies a much-travelled man, "is what they call soap (*zabau*, Portuguese *sabão*); see what a lather it makes." And there is much amused contempt in his tones as he gives the bit of information to the untravelled folk in his village.

The ablutions are finished and the white man is now drying himself, and while two or three spectators are passing remarks on the using of so good a cloth (towel) for such a purpose, a woman on the outskirts of the crowd asks, "Is that all he is

## 30 CHATTER ROUND THE FIRES

going to wash? Why, we wash all over!" and there is disdain mingled with disappointment as she puts the question, and a suggestion that the white man is not so clean as he might be. The white man's boy does not like the query in the tone, and as his honour is bound up with his master's, he informs the crowd generally that his master baths regularly in his own town. The woman is answered, and the public receives an interesting item of information, which, by and by, is distributed among the neighbouring villages, and the white man's reputation for cleanliness is saved.

About 6 P.M. the sun has sunk to rest, and as the evening grows darker the fires along the village street burn brighter, and around each fire little crowds gather, the younger members of which pass the time in laughter and chatter, and the older ones talk over the day's doings and the politics of the countryside. Outside the white man's house is also a blazing fire, around which his personal boys and carriers are sitting. The white man has arranged with his *capita* (head carrier) where they are to lunch and sleep on the morrow. All the carriers have a say in the matter, for have they not to carry loads weighing from 50 lbs. to 70 lbs. each according to their pay? And a caravan must not go faster than its slowest unit, or walk farther in a day than its weakest member can reach before sunset; otherwise the white man may find himself at night minus his bed and mosquito curtain, or his case of provisions, which has happened more than once; therefore a white man on the road does well to consult his men about the next day's journey.

One perennial theme of discussion among the carriers around the evening fire was the following query: If I send a boy to the market to buy some meat (*mbiji*), and there are fowls only for sale, should he buy a fowl, or return and say there is *no meat* at the market? The party was sure to split on this question. There was no word for poultry in the language. Some would contend that fowl was meat (*mbiji*), others would insist that by meat was meant buffaloes, cattle, goats, sheep, antelopes, &c., and "not things with feathers on

them." Their gesticulations were energetic, their voices raised, their tones threatening, and to one not used to them they appeared to be on the verge of a tremendous fight; but someone would advance an absurd argument, and they would all burst out laughing at him, adjourn the debate, and rolling themselves in their mats, they were soon grunting in sleep.

Another conundrum often propounded and never answered to the satisfaction of all parties was thus stated: If there were an antelope grazing on a neighbouring hill, and one man pointed his finger at it and the animal dropped dead, and another man glanced at it and the creature fell dead, who was the stronger person of the two—the one who glanced or the one who pointed his finger? The party would divide on this problem: some argued in favour of the one who looked and others backed up the one who pointed; and as the white traveller never had the same gang of carriers twice, he would, among his changing sets of men, find these questions constantly recurring. They were about as profitable as the wearisome discussions of the old schoolmen as to "How many angels can stand on the point of a needle?" or "Do angels in leaving one place and arriving at another have to pass through the intervening place?"

The Congo Railway is a thin line connecting the Lower Congo at Matadi with the Upper Congo at Stanley Pool, and is of incalculable advantage to all the white men at and above Stanley Pool; but to reach our stations at San Salvador, Kibokolo, and Mabaya in Portuguese Congo the railway is of little or no help; and the mode of travelling to San Salvador is much the same as it was thirty years ago. The tsetse fly forbids the use of horses, riding oxen, and mules; and although we have introduced the donkey, its life is very precarious, and consequently the cost is almost prohibitive.



## CHAPTER III

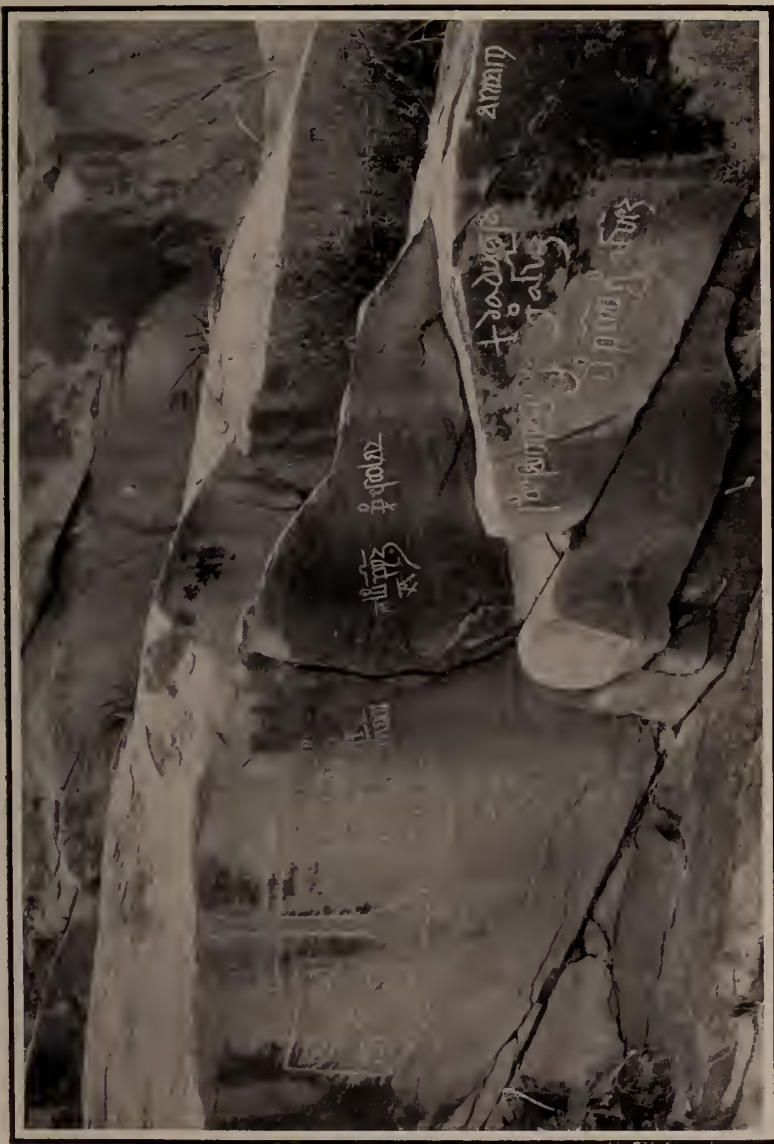
### SAN SALVADOR

THE town of San Salvador is situated on a plateau 1840 feet above the sea. The stone ruins of a cathedral, a monastery, and a fortress bear silent witness to the days when Portuguese Roman Catholics were dominant during the sixteenth century, both in the town and the district round. Occasionally, when turning over the soil in our garden, we came across the broken pieces of old iron bombs, probable tokens of the exchange of doubtful courtesies that passed between the Portuguese and the Dutch, who in those far-off days contended for the supremacy of the African coasts and hinterlands.<sup>1</sup> In these pages it is my purpose to give, as briefly as possible, an account of what I saw at San Salvador thirty years ago, and have observed since, of the system of government, and the election of King, nobles, and chiefs.

An hour or so after my arrival at San Salvador in February 1882, I received the compliments of the King, an expression of his goodwill, and a proof of his welcome in the shape of a pig, to which I have already referred.<sup>2</sup> The pig was sent ostensibly "to remove my hunger," but so far as the hunger was concerned there was no need for the pig, for the chief of every town in which we slept, or even rested, during our five days' journey, was desirous of presenting Mr. Hartland and myself

<sup>1</sup> Those who desire to study the ancient Kingdom of Kongo should read Duarte Lopez's account, written by Pigafetta in Rome, 1591, after a residence of twelve years in the country, and also the accounts of Bastian, Burton, Bentley, Grandy and others, who give more or less lengthy sketches of the history of the town, taken from the writings of the Portuguese priests. See plate facing p. 32, and also Appendix, Note I, p. 305, for ancient marks on rocks.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 28.



*Photo by*

# INSCRIPTION ON ROCKS ABOVE MATADI

*Rev. Mr. Petterson*

This inscription by Diogo Cão, made about 1482, was not discovered until over four hundred years later by Mr. Domenjos. For a translation and full particulars, see Note 1, page 305.





with a goat "to take away our hunger," as they put it, but in reality to receive a return present, which was always expected to be two or three times the value of the goat. We often begged them to keep their goats, and, if that was not successful in damping their ardour "to remove our hunger," we then told them of the smallness of the present they would receive as a return "dash," and that never failed.

With the King, however, it was different. We had come to live in his town, and it would have been an insult to us if he had not recognised our arrival by the present of a pig—a goat from him to us would have been too common for the purpose of showing due respect. The opportunity was taken, when presents of this kind were made, to give good return "dashes," for we had our land free, we paid neither rent, taxes, or tribute to the King, and no levy was made on us for our use of the natives as workmen and carriers, beyond their ordinary pay; and the King guarded our interests, and judged and punished all who robbed us if the circumstances demanded an appeal to him. It was, therefore, not only right, but wise, that we should recognise the King's position, and his kindly attitude towards us, by showing generosity in our occasional presents to him.

The day after our arrival my colleagues arranged for my presentation to Dom Pedro V, "*Ntotela, Ntinu a Kongo*," i.e. Emperor, King of Congo, whose personal name was *Elelo*, and whose sobriquet, he afterwards informed me, was "*weni w' ezulu*," or The great one of heaven.<sup>1</sup>

A short time before we were ready, we sent to ask an audience of the King, a ceremony never omitted even when we became more intimately acquainted with him. Our messenger soon returned to inform us that the King was willing to receive us. The pig given the day before was worth three or four pieces of cloth, but we selected ten pieces of what my colleagues thought he would like, and wrapped them in a piece of calico. A lad carried the bundle in front of us as we made our way to the centre of the town where the King's enclosure was

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, Note II, for a list of the Kings of Congo.

situated. We passed between high grass fences to the "judging place" (*mbaji a kongo*) in the middle of the town, where a huge, wide-spreading tree was growing, beneath the shade of which all important palavers were held; and crossing this town square we came to the first entrance to the King's enclosure (*lumbu*), which we found to be a miniature maze, as we had to negotiate four fences before we arrived at the central space where the King's house stood.

On entering the first opening in the fence we turned to the left, then to the right, then to the right again, and found another opening; then by turning once to the right and twice to the left we worked our way back to a position near the first entrance, where we discovered the third doorway in the fence; then turning to the left and again to the right there was the entrance leading into the courtyard immediately in front of the King's house. There was a 5-feet pathway between the fences. At the last entrance we sent a lad to inform the King that we were now near his house. After waiting a few minutes we received permission to advance, and found ourselves in an open space about 15 by 20 yards, with the front door of the "palace" opposite us. The King's house was large as native houses went, being about 18 feet wide by 25 feet long. The walls were of closely-fitting planks, and the roof of ordinary thatching-grass. Along one wall was a high, wide shelf covered with ewers, wash-hand basins, decanters, jugs, mugs, vases, and gaudily-painted china images—the profits of trading, and presents from chiefs and others. Beneath the shelf were various trunks, undoubtedly full of trade cloth and other treasures; and I afterwards learned that the King's bedroom was next to the reception-room, and beyond that the houses for his numerous wives.

We found the King sitting on a wicker sofa, and after shaking hands with him and receiving his welcome we sat on three European chairs that had been placed for us in front of his majesty, and the lad put the bundle of cloth at our feet. A little conversation then ensued about our journey, health, and several small matters, then thanks were given for the pig

sent "to remove our hunger," and my colleague, with a smile, made a sly reference to the King's chronic "hunger for cloth," the return present was made, each piece of cloth being slowly turned over, the King meanwhile feasting his eyes on them and counting the pieces. He thanked us for our fine present, expressed his pleasure at seeing the new white man, hoped he would have good health, &c., and, shaking hands again, we bade each other good-bye and departed. He was both hearty and dignified in his welcome and behaviour.

On walking about the town I found that all the headmen had fences round their houses—not so elaborate as the King's, but single fences with grass-covered gates, so that passers by could not spy upon their privacy. Each enclosure contained all the houses belonging to the headman owning the place—a house for himself, a house for each of his wives, houses for his slaves, and very often a visitor's house. Children lived with their mothers, but when a boy reached the age of twelve he went to the bachelor's house or club (*nzo a toko*, or *nzo a mbongi*). Ordinary folk had no enclosure; their houses abutted the roads and paths, and all they did was open to the full view of any passer by.

In 1859 the King of Kongo was known as the Marquis of Katende, and as such he visited the Portuguese to ask for priests to bury his predecessor and to crown himself as King.<sup>1</sup> He was then "a handsome, stout, middle-aged man, with a very much better caste of countenance than is usual among the Congos."<sup>2</sup> When I first met him in 1882 he was about 6 feet 4 inches in height, very stout, being 60 inches round the waist, and his face badly pitted with the smallpox. He was ungainly and awkward in his walk and movements by reason of his obesity; he was crafty in his policy, cunning in his dealings with others, and always sharp enough to play one party off against another to his own advantage. He was good-humoured, enjoyed a joke even at his own expense, and was ever ready to give or take a proverb that half concealed a streak of

<sup>1</sup> Monteiro's *Angola*, vol. i. 211.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 217.

railery. Personally I have none but pleasant memories of him.

There were many rumours of his cruelty and blood-thirstiness. He murdered his own mother in the following manner: He had a hole dug and put a mat over it, and then invited her to sit down, and when the mat gave way beneath her weight, and she fell into the hole, he stood by while she was buried alive by his orders. Since that time no one will sit on a mat without first looking under it or removing it to another place. Whatever he was previously, the desire to be well thought of by the white men living in his town, and, strange as it may seem, by Queen Victoria, had a restraining influence on him, and deterred him from committing many a cruel, savage deed. How frequently he asked me what Queen Victoria thought of him, and how often he begged me to write her on his behalf to send his greetings to her! He never would believe that such a letter would not reach Her Gracious Majesty, and I never humoured him, as I had more than a suspicion that it was not a letter in reply that he desired but a rich present. Again and again he said to those who offended him, "I would kill you but for the white men," or, "but for Queen Victoria." He was a strange mixture of good and evil: full of desires for the right, and of strong, overmastering inclinations to the wrong. He was superstitious to the last degree, his movements were controlled by omens, and he lived in constant fear of being bewitched. He had a stone given him by a priest, and he was told by the said priest that he was to lick the stone every morning, for he would not die until the stone was worn away by his tongue. He died on February 14, 1891, having reigned about thirty-two years.

When a King of Kongo died it was the custom for the headmen of the town to say for many months that he was only ill. When the secret of his death could no longer be kept, it was announced, and the body was buried with due honours. Thereupon the powerful chiefs of the surrounding district fought for the throne, and the strongest took it.

The conqueror went to the town of the former King—San

Salvador, which was always neutral—with his family, relatives, followers, and slaves, and, taking possession of it, he sat in the King's chair, appropriated his staff of office, and in fact became King. Of all his predecessor's possessions the new King received only the staff (*mpangu*), as it was the insignia of his kingship, and was regarded as the property of him who captured the royal office. It was believed that their kingship was bound up in the staff, and without its possession, although they might have all things else, they could not be King. The family and followers of the new King built their houses round his to support him in his new position. It is most probable that the death of the King was told immediately and secretly by friends at court to each powerful chief in the district, who at once prepared to fight for the throne; and when they were ready for the struggle they gave intimation to the headmen at San Salvador that the King's death should be announced.

The old King, Dom Henrique Lunga, died in 1858, and Kiambu of Nkunga seized the capital, San Salvador, and installed himself as King. Elelo, Marquis of Katende, was a near relative of the deceased King, and made several attempts to capture the capital and throne, but his forces were too weak. He thereupon went to Bembe and asked the Portuguese, who were working some copper mines at that place, to send some priests to bury his predecessor (who, however, had already been buried a considerable time), knowing well that they would be accompanied by a military force, which he hoped would establish him on the throne. His ruse succeeded. Soldiers were sent with the priests, and after a long series of fights Elelo, Marquis of Katende, was crowned King. The Portuguese occupied the country, rebuilt the fortress on the south-eastern edge of the plateau, remained for some seven years, and then abandoned the district.

I frequently visited Kiambu, the man who was ousted out of his rightful kingdom by Elelo's ruse. He was a man of fine presence, tall and dignified, but his mobile face was marred by wicked, devilish eyes. In the war with the Portuguese he is said, on good authority, to have killed a white soldier and



eaten his liver<sup>1</sup> to indicate his hatred of the men—the white men, who had helped his conquered foe, Elelo, to drive him out of his capital. At the time I knew him he had one of his own daughters living in his “enclosure” as his wife. He was condemned by all the natives for this act of incest, so repellent to them; and his excuse was that she was so beautiful that she could not possibly be his daughter.

Kiambu was never allowed in San Salvador, nor was he permitted to cross the small river that acted as a boundary to his land. Just on the outskirts of his town was a large native hut containing the dried corpse of a near relative. Six unmarried girls were appointed each month to guard the body, and keep the house clean; for he had been told by a native “medicine man” that he (Kiambu) would die the day after the corpse was buried, hence in 1883 the body had remained unburied for over twenty years, and it was not interred until after Kiambu died some years later. I have a suspicion that the cost of the funeral festivities, which are very great, had more to do with the body being left unburied than his superstitious fears.

<sup>1</sup> Some natives think that cannibalism was, at one time, common in the country, as there are traces of it yet to be found, in men drinking the blood and eating the livers of those they have killed in a fight. This, however, is not a common custom, but it is sometimes done.

## CHAPTER IV

### COURT ETIQUETTE AND NATIVE FUNCTIONARIES

THERE was much ceremony observed at the King's court. No one approached him without first seeking his permission, and no one was allowed to sit on a chair in his presence except his own near relatives, such as sons and nephews; and up to 1884 no native was permitted to own a European chair even for private use.

Ordinary men approaching the King had to kneel three times, once just inside the last entrance to the King's enclosure, then near the door of the "palace," and lastly, immediately in front of his majesty; and the last time they knelt, they put the palms of their hands together, rubbed their little fingers in the dirt, and then transferred the dirt from their little fingers to their foreheads or temples and clapped their hands. This ceremony they repeated three times at the last kneeling-place; and the King answered by putting the palms of his hand across each other with the fingers of the right hand well above the thumb and index finger of the left hand, and waving them. If the King did not answer thus, or if he thrust out his foot and waved his toes—which was an insult—the sooner the man retreated the better for him.<sup>1</sup>

If a man omitted to send or take the King a share of his trading profits he would not be favourably received, and might expect to see his majesty's toes wave instead of his fingers. Well-to-do chiefs who failed to send him occasional presents were also coldly received, and the waving toes reminded them of their delinquencies. No written account was kept, but the King, like all natives, had a remarkable memory for what was

<sup>1</sup> See chapter on Salutations, &c., for a fuller description of paying homage to, or saluting, the King.

owing to him, and never forgot when a debt was to be paid, or a present was due. Chiefs and noblemen had to render homage to the King in the same manner as an ordinary man, but not every time they went into his presence.

The King possessed twenty-five wives, who lived in an enclosure at the back of his house, each having her own hut. Most of them were either the daughters or sisters of headmen, or of chiefs of the neighbouring towns, and when walking about the town both men and women would stand aside respectfully to allow them to pass. No homage was paid to them, but they were always spoken to and of with much deference by the common people. Although the King had so many wives he had only three children by them. Living as I have done for thirty years in closest touch with the people, my observations lead me to hold most firmly the opinion that polygamy on the Congo neither conduces to large families, nor to morality.<sup>1</sup>

No one ate at the same table with the King, nor was anyone, except his nephews and counsellors (*mbanda-mbanda*), allowed to sit at the same fire. I have been present more than once when his majesty has had a tickling in the throat and has coughed and spluttered to free the passage. All present clapped their hands most vigorously, and when he expectorated the sputum was carried away by one of his wives, and it was either buried or burnt.

In handing anything to, or receiving anything from the King the person always knelt, and put the palm of his left hand under his right arm just below the elbow, or if the article was too large for one hand then both hands, palms upward and slightly arched, were held out to offer or receive the proffered object. And in delivering a message to the King, or while receiving one from him, the messenger had also to kneel.<sup>2</sup> It was very rarely that his majesty left his enclosure, but when he did six of the Doms or headmen of his town carried

<sup>1</sup> See *Among Congo Cannibals* (Seeley, Service & Co.) by the author, pp. 134-139, for a fuller discussion on the effects of polygamy.

<sup>2</sup> This same ceremony was observed in handing things to or receiving things from chiefs, important men, and by children to their fathers.





*Photo by*

#### PRESENT KING OF KONGO IN STATE

*Dr. Mercier Gamble*

Dom Manuel Martins Kidity is the first King under the Portuguese Republic. He is here seated on his throne in the town square to change the chieftainship of Mputu from a man to a woman. He is receiving the Mputu people as shown in the picture below.



*Photo by*

#### APPROACHING THE KING CEREMONIOUSLY

*Dr. Mercier Gamble*

The Mputu people were dissatisfied with the weak policy of their chief, so they asked the King to replace him by Ditina, a woman of strong character, the widow of a former chief. The crowd approaches only a few paces at a time, then they salute and the band plays. The chieftainess has a white hand on her hat, and the man next to her on the left is the chief who is being deposed.



him in a hammock, even if the distance was only one or two hundred yards—as from his “palace” to the mission station. He was so ponderous that he needed the combined strength of the six men—three at each end of the pole—to carry him with security and dignity. It was very fortunate for them that he did not often visit the town.

On state occasions he dressed in the cast-off uniform of a general, or some other high officer, except the trousers, in which I never saw him; but in place of the nether garments, he wore round his waist and hanging below his knees many yards of velvet, or other fine cloth; a cockade and a sword completed his attire. In his boxes he had many such uniforms—the gifts of visitors to his town, and the result of trading. On other than ceremonial occasions one often found him squatting on the ground in his house, or on a mat in the courtyard, dressed in a dirty shirt of Oxford print and a loincloth of common trading print.

Chiefs far and near sent their nephews to be brought up “at the King’s knee,” *i.e.* at court, so as to learn its ceremonies, its etiquette in receiving visitors, and the best way of settling palavers. These pages waited on the King, were his messengers on ordinary occasions, ran his errands, and finished the food left after they had served him at table. Their uncles gave a premium to the King, according to their wealth and position, for taking their nephews (their heirs); and occasionally sent presents to them, a part of which found their way to the King’s boxes. These pages undoubtedly had many small perquisites from those who desired their good offices with the King. By the chatter of these lads and his councillors’ gossip he was kept well informed of everything that happened in the town, in the trading factories, and in the missions. Whenever the King sent a page to us with a message or a request the lad brought with him an article of the King’s attire as a guarantee that he came from his majesty. Once or twice they came without such a guarantee, and I sent them back for a proof that they had come from their master, and I heard no more about the matter.

## 42 POWER OF LIFE AND DEATH

The King had full power of life and death. He could kill a person without trial by simply appointing a man to shoot the one whose death he desired. This power he used prudently, for during my residence at San Salvador I heard of only two who were killed by the King's orders, and they were lovers of the royal wives. A headman who was growing too rich and powerful he would "eat up" on some pretext or other—generally a charge of witchcraft—but it had to be done cautiously. He had no army, so apart from his family, his immediate followers bound to him by personal interests, and his slaves, he was dependent on the goodwill of the people and their superstitious fears of him as the possessor of the great fetish.

Attached to the court were several officers who performed various duties for the King. The following are their titles and functions:

The King, when I first knew him, was too old and too obese to travel with any degree of comfort to himself, or to his followers, over the rough and hilly roads to the towns of chiefs to be ennobled. Such a ceremony could take place in *their* towns only, so at the court there was an officer whose business it was to confer titles, as the representative of the King, on those to be distinguished. His official name was *Kapitāu*, and for the ceremonies connected with the conferring of a title see page 45.

Connected also with the court was an officer who theoretically was supposed never to leave his master's enclosure (*lumbu*), hence his name *Nelumbu*. He was a master of ceremonies, or a kind of chamberlain. Another officer carried messages from the King to the chiefs, and to towns, and when on such embassies he carried the King's staff (*mpangu*) with him as a token of his authority and a proof that he had come from his majesty, hence his official title was *Nempangu*, which may be freely translated as Staff-bearer. *Mbila* means to summon, call out, and *Nembila* was the name of the King's messenger who went to summon chiefs, important headmen, &c., to the royal presence, and to inform the people of his majesty's wishes and commands.

Another officer stayed about the King's person to wait on

him and to carry out such important orders as could not be entrusted to the pages who served the King. His title was *Nejinguzioka*, and literally meant: One who walks about, always on the move. *Neloto* was the lowest in rank about the court, and the word comes from *loto*, a spoon, and simply means Spoonbearer.

The King had a number of counsellors (*mbanda-mbanda*), who were selected for their acuteness and wisdom, and were always chosen from among the people of San Salvador; but the favourite officer was the *Nemfilantu*, for he was the most trusted of all his people, and acted as a kind of Premier, and the name means literally: One who holds or moves about the King's head, or the one in whose lap the King puts his head.

Attached to the court, but outside of it, was a man whose special duty it was to assess the tax on all trading caravans passing through the town, or travelling through the near district. He was to some extent responsible for the safe conduct of caravans through that part of the country of which the King was overlord. Of course the larger portions of the amounts thus collected found their way to the King's treasury. The man who held this office in the early eighties was well known to me under the title of nobility called *Mfutila*. Now, *mfutila* is a payment to or for, and is from the verb *futa*=to pay. It is probable that the title means: Officer of the King's taxes, or The one who makes others pay.

Among the chiefs of the town there were many who held titles of nobility. These titles were conferred by the King either for services rendered, or for money paid to him—more frequently the latter. The title became hereditary, and descended with the chieftainship of the town and the property to the rightful heir.

A man, we will say, buys from the King the title of *Tulante* for one slave and 5000 strings of blue pipe beads.<sup>1</sup> If on his death his heir is not rich enough to support the

<sup>1</sup> This was the amount actually paid for it by the uncle of the present holder of the title.



title, or does not care to pay the expenses for the ceremonies connected with his installation, or for some other reason does not desire it, he can with the consent of the King sell it to another chief for a stated sum for that chief's life time. When this "life-buyer" of the title dies, his heir cannot assume the title, unless he procures the permission of the family originally holding it, and for their consent he must pay; and the King cannot confer it without the consent of the said family. In fact the title reverts to the family that originally bought it direct from the King, and the head of that family can resume it, or pass it on as a life title to another chief. This apparently applies only to certain titles of which there can only be one holder at any given time. There can only be one *Tulante*, and whenever this title is conferred, either on the proper heir to it, or on a life-buyer of it, the King always receives a large present from the recipient at the time of his installation into the ranks of nobles.

The ceremony of installation is as follows: The title of *Tulante* is to be conferred on a chief whose name is Nlemvo<sup>1</sup> who has inherited the property, the chieftainship of the town, and the title from his uncle. On the death of the uncle Nlemvo, the heir, although he had an undisputed right to the title, yet could not assume it until it was properly conferred by the King, or his representative; and Nlemvo himself did not ask for it until he had gathered sufficient cloth, goats, pigs, &c. to pay the necessary expenses of the ceremony. Thus a man might be entitled to a high rank, and yet be known only as *mfumu* Nlemvo=chief Nlemvo, or, as *Ngudi a Nkama* Nlemvo=Mother, or origin-of-a-hundred Nlemvo. The use, however, of *Ngudi a Nkama* before a name seems to point to the fact that the man is heir to a higher title. *Ngudi a Nkama* is often playfully

<sup>1</sup> In the early eighties I was well acquainted with Nlemvo's uncle, and often stayed in his town. Nlemvo, from whom I received these details, is still alive—a most intelligent man of about forty-five years of age.

prefixed to a person's name, especially if he is pompous and bumptious in his gait and talk.

Nlemvo having collected the necessary goods for the payment of expenses, and the provisions for the feasts always observed on such occasions, and having also made all arrangements with the King, on the appointed day the Kapitāu arrived at Nlemvo's town, and was received and treated with due respect as the King's representative. A good house was given to him for his accommodation, and a plentiful store of food was supplied to him. Nlemvo's own clan, *i.e.* his mother's clan, was called, and any of his father's clan who desired to be present were permitted to do so; but all other clans were strictly excluded from the ceremony.

The crowd formed a large circle, in the centre of which a leopard's skin was spread, and a chair placed on it. The Kapitāu went up to Nlemvo, who was sitting among his people, and hooking the index finger of his right hand in the little finger of Nlemvo's left hand, he led him up to the leopard's skin, and walking him round it as far as the tail, told him to step over that, and then leading him to the front of the chair, he seated him in it, whereupon the crowd clapped the loosely-closed fists of their left hands with the palms of their right hands.

When all was again quiet the Kapitāu put on the candidate's head some *lemba-lemba* leaves, and wetting his hands with palm-wine he pressed the palms to Nlemvo's temples, to his forehead and back of the head, to his shoulders, and to his knees; this he did three times, and then pronounced a blessing: "May you be blessed and lucky, and when you speak may your words be heard (obeyed) by the people."<sup>1</sup>

Then the Kapitāu asked loudly three times: "Do you know this man's name?" and the crowd replied each time in the negative. Whereupon the Kapitāu shouted: "Origin-of-a-hundred Tulante waiting for the mercy (kindness) of

<sup>1</sup> *Ovwa nsambu yo malau, wavova diambu diwa wantu.*

## 46 CEREMONY OF INSTALLATION

Almighty God.”<sup>1</sup> The people on hearing this rounded their mouths, and beat them with the extended fingers of their right hands, making thereby a long series of “Wo! wo! wo!” Others fired guns and shouted.

When quiet was restored, the Kapitāu told the new noble to be good to his people, and turning to the crowd, he told them to obey their chief. He instructed the new Tulante never to carry anything when walking on the roads, or visiting, or going to the markets—in fact he was never again to carry anything like a boy, or common person, except his gun or stick; and if he shot a bird or an animal he must not even carry the game he had killed. Should a person ever meet him carrying any article except his gun or walking-stick, the said person had the right to take it away from him, and either keep it for himself or sell it. Neither might the new noble ever beat his wife or wives, and if he did, he could be mulcted in a fine of fowls, or one goat; and the new noble was never to gather firewood, or fetch water. A bracelet was then put on Nlemvo’s arm as a sign of his new and important title.

Nlemvo gave the Kapitāu and his assistant five pieces of cloth, one pig, and two goats; and he sent to the King at San Salvador seventy pieces of cloth.<sup>2</sup> The King was so satisfied with his present, that he sent a large velvet cloth worth twenty-five francs to the new Tulante.

The new noble can now be appointed by the King to confer titles on others; he can also act as a judge in settling matters between persons, and quarrels between towns; and for this judicial work he receives fees that eventually more than refund all the expenses incurred by the above ceremony of installation.

The following are some of the titles of nobility:

1. *Tulante*. The present holder of this title cannot give me its meaning.

<sup>1</sup> NGUDI A NKAMA TULANTE NINGAMENA NKANK’A NZAMBI A MPUNGU, DEZU. DEZU, untranslated in the text as it is redundant, is from Portuguese *Deos*.

<sup>2</sup> This was exactly the price given by Nlemvo, who personally gave me all the particulars.



2. *Lubatabata*=a strong man.

3. *Katendi*=one who must fight to the last, and never give in. This was the title of Elelo, Dom Pedro V, before he ascended the throne. There is a native saying that runs thus: "The Katendi's finger-nails must not be cut, or his clan will die out,"<sup>1</sup> i.e. he must always fight and never have his claws cut.

4. *Nkangampaka*=a strong man who disregards objections and difficulties, but goes straight on his way. This was the title of a former chief of Mpalabala town near Matadi whom I met several times: and although his town was over eighty miles from San Salvador yet he sent tribute periodically to the King.

5. *Mpidixipe*, from the Portuguese *Principe*. This noble was sometimes Premier. The title is of modern introduction, probably dating from the early sixties, when the Portuguese set Elelo on the throne, and occupied the town for seven years.

6. *Mfutula*=payment to or for (see page 43). Assessor, and collector of taxes on caravans, &c.

7, *Kabata*; 8, *Masaku*; 9, *Nsaku*; 10, *Sengele*; 11, *Nkondi*; and 12, *Nemwanda*, are also titles of high rank, but their significance has been forgotten. It is possible that in ancient times, when the Kingdom of Kongo was at the zenith of its power and glory, the above titles belonged to men of high rank in the King's household, or system of government, and as their offices, through the breaking up of the kingdom, have dropped into desuetude, the meanings have become lost to the present holders of the titles.

13. *Nenkondo*. When the exigencies of life demand that a new law be made or an old one revived, the chiefs of the district meet together and arrange what the new law shall be, what fine shall be inflicted for breaking it, and they also appoint a chief to administer it, to see that it is properly observed, and to follow with punishment the breaker of it. All fines received are periodically distributed among the chiefs

<sup>1</sup> *Katendi katendwa nzala o makanda mamene.*

concerned, but the one appointed to administer the law retains a larger share than that given to an ordinary chief, for he has all the trouble of guarding the law and enforcing the fines. This administrator takes the title of *Nenkondo*.

All the men and women of San Salvador and the immediate district have what they call a "*santu*" (from the Portuguese word, *sancto*), or as we should call it—a Christian name. This custom of having a *santu*<sup>1</sup> is a survival of the days when the Roman Catholic Church was dominant in the land, and the converts were given a holy name when baptized into the Church.

About the time of birth a native name is given to the boy. Sometimes it is whimsical and without any particular meaning, at other times it indicates the manner in which the child was born; and in some instances the name marks a bit of family history, such as a time of sorrow, or comfort, or joy—much the same as the old scriptural names. Later in life, at the age of twelve or fourteen, the lad can take another name of his own choice, if he is dissatisfied with his birth-name, and allow his first name to be forgotten by disuse. While in their teens they select a *santu*, a Portuguese name Congoised, as Man-wele=Manuel, Nzwao=João=John, &c.; and the women take Madia=Maria, &c. To these *santus* they prefix *Dom* and *Donna* respectively. In San Salvador and its neighbourhood everybody has a *santu*, but the farther you travel from San Salvador the less frequently is the *santu* found among the people. Although there is a native ceremony of baptism, yet it is not often observed, as anyone can change his or her name, and take a new one, or a *santu*, without following any rites, and thus save the medicine-man's fee.

Though the possession of *Dom* and *Donna* is so common, yet the use of them is somewhat restricted to the better class of natives, much the same as our use of Mr., Mrs., and Miss.

<sup>1</sup> The *santu* is given by a sponsor, or godfather, or godmother, and the child had to respect his godparent (*ese dia njila ezulu*=father of the road to heaven), and to do anything wrong to a sponsor is regarded as a crime. Godparents and godchildren could not marry.

Of some men the natives never spoke without calling them *Dom*, and to others the natives never prefixed the *Dom* except when they desired to ingratiate themselves, or ask a special favour. What is said about the boy and the man, applies equally as well to girls and women. Men and women, boys and girls, on leaving the *ndembo*<sup>1</sup> secret society received new names which they could use or not as they pleased; and all the men and lads initiated into the *nkimba* guild also received new names. Thus a man could possess five names, viz. his birth-name, his selected name, his *santu*, his *ndembo*, and his *nkimba* names.

We had then in the San Salvador society, the King, the counsellors, the nobility, the chiefs of towns, the court officers, the Doms and Donnas, the common people, and the slaves. San Salvador itself is known to the natives as Kongo, but to distinguish it from several other Kongos, *e.g.* Kongo dia Mpalabala and Kongo di' Elemba, it is called Kongo dia Ntotela, *i.e.* the King's Kongo, as it has from time immemorial been the residence of the King of the country. Sometimes it is called Kongo dia Ngunga, *i.e.* the Kongo of the Bell, probably because the Roman Catholic priests had formerly a large bell there, which was rung in connection with their services.

<sup>1</sup> On taking a *ndembo* name on initiation into the mysteries of this secret society the "doctor" of the society appointed a man to be regarded as the father (*ese dia elemba*) of the new member. He was treated with much respect by his "child."

## CHAPTER V

### REMINISCENCES OF DOM PEDRO V, KING OF KONGO

OUR first introduction to the King was in February 1882. We then found him sitting on a wicker sofa in his "palace," a veritable Tichbourne for size. He was dressed in a white straw hat, a very dirty white shirt, and a no less dirty cloth over his knees. He was mourning the death of one of his wives, hence his dirty, untidy appearance. She had been dead two months, and was left unburied while her brother procured the cloth, beads, &c., necessary to inter her with the pomp and ceremony suited to her position as a royal wife. During those two months the King had "mourned," *i.e.* he had neglected his personal appearance, wore old and dirty garments, and left his skin unoiled and undusted with camwood powder. The King, however, was usually clean in his attire and habits, and on great occasions could even be smart in his dress. At a great palaver that took place in March 1882 he was attired in the following manner. I quote from notes written at the time. He wore a loincloth of scarlet and black velvet, a clean white shirt, a black waistcoat with brass buttons, a scarlet cloth coat with tails, and a white straw hat. In his hand he held a six-chamber revolver (unloaded, for he had no cartridges); a man held a large umbrella of red and black velvet over his head; and when he stepped forward to speak, his son, carrying a sword in its scabbard, walked behind him holding a very small red parasol over his head, vainly endeavouring to shade the moving mass of flesh.

Having received many small acts of kindness from the King, I asked him one day in 1882 what personal present I

could make him, and he desired a shirt or two of strong material; and that they might fit him properly, he lent me an old shirt from which to take the measurements. He was of no mean stature and girth, as the following figures will prove, which I transcribe from my letter to the lady whom I asked to make the shirts: "The shirts must have cuffs, collars, and fronts. The sizes are as follows: From shoulder to shoulder 2 ft. 11 in. Waist 5 ft. 8 in. in circumference. Arm-holes 23 in. Round the neck 20 in. Arm 1 ft. 3 in. not including the cuff, which is to be 5 in. long and 9 in. round. From top to bottom 3 ft. 6 in. I should tell you that the King is expert with his needle, and his twenty-five wives just as clever at farming. The folk are often asking what kind of work Queen Victoria does."

The lady wanted to know if I had made a mistake in the measurements; but on being assured that they were correct, she set to work, and in due time the shirts arrived in San Salvador. The King frequently asked about the progress of those garments; but he was too courteous to express in words what he must often have thought in his heart—that they were a long time coming. The old man was delighted to receive the present, and quickly donned one of the shirts, and finding it was a comfortable fit, and the work satisfying his critical eye, he was neither slow nor meagre in his expressions of pleasure and gratitude; and when, three years later, the lady, the maker of the shirts, arrived in his town, he accorded her a most hearty welcome, and thanked her personally for the trouble she had taken and the skill she had shown.

Occasionally we invited him to dinner, and the *pièce de resistance* was a sucking-pig, which in those days we could buy for a shilling's worth of cloth or beads. Although his house was less than 400 yards away, he always came in his state hammock, carried by six of his headmen. Fortunately the headmen were strong and in the prime of life, otherwise the King's weight would have taxed them too much. The hammock was of native cotton, grown, dyed, and woven in a neighbouring village. It was covered with red cloth, adorned



with tassels and bells, and a canopy was arranged to shield the rider from the sun. As there were no clocks in the "palace" we asked our guest to come at sunset; and no sooner was the sun below the horizon than we heard the shouts of the people as they accompanied the King's hammock to the station. As he got near we could hear the tinkling of the ferret bells on the hammock, the hurried, heavy breathing of the hammock-carriers, and their short, sharp sentences of direction to each other. They were not at all sorry to lower the hammock at our door, where we stood ready to receive and welcome him, who, although black, had come in the most kingly manner he knew, and was certainly very dignified in most of his ways and words.

The boys quickly put the dinner on the table, and the King eyed every dish hungrily. I said to him one day when visiting him in his courtyard, and we were both in a joking mood, "Do you know what the poorer class of English boys do when they are invited to a feast?"

"No," he said, and as he saw me hesitate he asked, "Well, what do they do?"

"Why, they eat very little all day," I replied, "so as to have plenty of room for the feast."

The old man rolled with laughter, snapped his fingers, slapped his thighs, and tears came from his eyes as he said, "Why, white man, that is what I do, but I did not know anybody else was cute enough to think of that; but Mfumu Weekisi, I am smarter than those white boys, for I don't eat anything all day when I am coming to take dinner with you at sunset." After that I could understand the hungry look in his eyes as he watched the dishes put on the table; and we always hurried the boys in their operations.

Native provisions of all kinds were very cheap, and by sacrificing one or two tins of preserved goods we were generally successful, although lacking the help of a white lady, in working out a menu of six or seven simple courses. Soup made of fowl and goat bones with odd bits of meat and seasoning; tin of fresh herrings baked or fried; a roast fowl, stewed goat, roast sucking-pig, and baked rice pudding with stewed paw-



*Photo by*

*Rev. R. H. C. Graham*

### STATE ROBES OF THE KING OF KONGO

These robes and the silver sceptre were a present from the King of Portugal in 1888, when the first resident governor went to reside in San Salvador. The robes, etc., are State property and pass from the King to his successor. This is Mtembe, Dom Pedro VI.





paws, were our dishes. Our drinks were limejuice made from fresh limes, and coffee grown in the district.

I think I can see the old King now sitting on the other side of the wide table; squatting on the ground immediately behind him is a row of five or six of his favourite wives; and standing against the wall are the six headmen who carried the hammock. The doors are crowded with gaping, curious natives talking in low whispers; the house-boys are moving noiselessly with naked feet over the beaten clay floor; and the light from our small colza oil lamps, supplemented on this festive occasion by a couple of candles, throw their soft light over the table, but scarcely relieve the darkness beyond. And the white man sitting on one side of the table has the only white face in all that crowd of black figures.

The King takes a few spoonfuls of soup and passes the rest down with a piece of bread to his waiting wives, who quickly and quietly finish them; the fish he eats all up because it comes from the white man's country, and his wives pout their disappointment. We give him a liberal share of fowl, but that is so common that after selecting the best pieces the rest is finished by his expectant wives; goat comes next, but is treated with as scant courtesy as that bestowed on the fowl; and meanwhile the old man turns his eyes repeatedly towards the roasted pig. That at last is put before us, and we pile his plate with a liberal portion, which rapidly disappears, and all the time his wives are making mouths in the semi-darkness. He grunts assent to more when we ask him, and we again load his plate. Is not this the moment for which he has lived all the hours of that long day? for he had heard that the white man has bought a pig for dinner. There is nothing that the white man does but he hears all about it a few minutes afterwards in his courtyard.

A third time his plate is filled, but before he is half way through he is conquered, so with a sigh he hands the remainder to his longing wives. He plays with the rice pudding and stewed native fruit as much as to say, How can one eat such poor stuff after roast sucking-pig? We hand down a

## 54 KING TALKS ABOUT HIMSELF

large dish of food to the wives; and while we are drinking our coffee the headmen are clearing up the dishes, with the aid of house-boys, in the kitchen—the remnants of the feast are their perquisites, so that there is not a bone left that a dog would look at twice.

Through the meal the King is too busy to talk much; but directly eating is over his tongue is loosened, and he tells us of his travels about the country, of the fights by which he gained for himself the sobriquet of “the great one of heaven,” and his earnest wish to send a letter to Queen Victoria. We on our part relate the wonders of our country, the size of our great cities, the number of our ships and soldiers, our coal, iron, and salt mines, the speed and comfort of railway travelling; the wealth, power and majesty of the great white Queen. His eyes and mouth would open widely in amazement, and, although he was too polite to ask me if I were lying, yet he often interrupted me to ask if I were telling the truth, and I have a dim suspicion that during our earlier acquaintance he thought I was a magnificent liar in talking about my country and Queen as I did. Of course his people when travelling about the country talked of him in exaggerated terms to the ignorant people in the distant villages. His twenty-five wives became a hundred, his three children were multiplied by ten or more, and everything he said and did was highly coloured. He had heard all about it, and thought that the white man was naturally doing the same for his Queen and country.

He would petulantly ask why his country was not rich, great, and strong, and why they were so poor and foolish compared to white people. We would point out the baneful influence of the witch-doctors, and the way in which they had kept the people from making any progress, killing off as witches the most progressive men and the inventive geniuses of the country. We generally finished our conversations with a talk on Christianity, and not infrequently with family prayers.

It was our custom to go every Sunday evening to conduct

a short religious service in his courtyard. Sometimes he was alone except for a few personal attendants, at other times there would be from fifty to a hundred persons present; but whether many or few, he always made me welcome, had a chair placed for me immediately in front of him so that we sat almost knee to knee, and would listen most attentively to all that was said. In his better moods I have seen the tears trickle down his cheeks as he recalled the murders, &c., of former years, and on our parting he would bid me come again quickly; but in his harder moments I have seen his eyes flash murderous hate, and his face cloud with fiercest anger at some remark that touched him to the quick. For some reason he was very desirous of our good opinion, consequently he curbed his passion and controlled his savagery in a wonderful manner. I think he had an idea that we reported his sayings and doings to Queen Victoria, and he wished that she should hear only good about him.

On more than one occasion I heard that the royal wives had gone out on strike by refusing, for the time being, to cook any food for his majesty. There was an understanding among them that whenever he was unreasonable in his treatment of one or more of them, the others took sides with them, and by refraining to cook or do anything for the old man they soon brought him to reason. At such times his diet was a few roasted pea-nuts, and that for not one meal only, but for two or three days. Being very stout, he was not able to chase his wives and beat them, for they soon ran beyond his reach; he dared not send slaves to catch and handle freeborn women; and his headmen preferred neither to help nor to interfere, for Congo women have nasty tempers and terrible tongues.

One day I passed through his house to the women's quarters behind, in search of him, and found his majesty in a towering passion, surrounded by about twenty of his wives. They were all clapping their hands—an action that always accompanied the begging of a favour—and beseeching him in pleading tones not to beat her; and all the time so closely clustering round

him that they impeded his movements, rendering it impossible for him to catch the delinquent wife even if he had been more agile than he was. Each woman acted her part admirably, knowing that when she did something for which he wanted to flog her, the others would surround him and thus protect her. When, however, a general strike took place, it was impossible for one fat old man to beat twenty-five strapping women, almost every one of whom would have been more than a match for him in a fair fight—so his boys roasted for him a few pea-nuts, or a plantain, and in the meantime he threatened them with his fetish, and stored up a good appetite for the tasty dishes that were sure to come when reconciliation took place.

In June 1884 the King suffered from a large sloughing ulcer, and I went twice a day to dress the place. Soon after commencing this bit of medical work on his majesty, he gave his permission for calling a great witch-doctor to discover the person who was bewitching the King; but directly I heard of this I sent a message to my patient saying that “if he proceeded with the witch palaver I would not again dress the sore.” He instantly stopped the witch-doctor and sent him and his people away; and a few days later a headman, in thanking me for taking this action, said, “If you had not been here someone would have been killed as a witch.”

Some time before the above incident the King conceived the idea that much of the sickness prevalent in the town might be removed by paying more respect to a certain neglected fetish. He therefore selected some girls and placed them in a fetish house, where they remained for several weeks to attend upon and propitiate the fetish. During their stay in the fetish house they lived upon the uncooked blood of sucking-pigs and raw fowls, together with a few nuts and roots. They could not leave the house, and a man was not allowed to approach it: but they were waited upon by one or two old women. Just as this ceremony was finished, and his majesty had rewarded the girls with good presents, his foot became very much swollen and painful, and every means they

took to cure it entirely failed. The old man became very angry with the fetish for serving him such a scurvy trick after paying away so much good money on its behalf.

In December 1884, the members of a German Geographical Expedition arrived at San Salvador and stayed with us in the mission house. After the excitement of their arrival had abated, I went and asked the King to see them and to accord to them a fitting welcome, but he refused to see them. The Portuguese Padres had been before me, and had told the King that these white men had come to take his country, that they were Bulamatadi's (Stanley's) white men, and if he saw them it would be bad for him and his people.

On returning to our house I told them what the King had said; and our visitors were exceedingly vexed, because the Padres knew very well who and what they were—Germans travelling for the Berlin Geographical Society. Dr. Büthner then brought out a book written by a German traveller, Bastian, who visited San Salvador in 1861 or 1862, and read from it some incidents that happened at that time in which the King took part, and which they thought he would call to mind if I would tell him; and they requested me to add that they were countrymen of the man who was so friendly with the King.

I went to see the old King again, and said; "Do you remember a white man who came to see you about twenty-three years ago, and you and he made a feast for all the headmen in the town, and they all became so drunk that they fell about your courtyard? Then you and he went with calabashes and pots of water and poured their contents over the drunken men while they were lying about on the ground." I thought the old gentleman would have rolled off his big chair with laughter; but on quietening down he asked, "How did you hear of that? Why, that white man was my very good friend!" I then told him how that white man went home and wrote a book, and put in it all about the King of Kongo, and that these white men who had just arrived were his countrymen. When the King heard that he at once said he would



see them; and the next day he gave them a right royal reception.

A few days after their visit to the King, Dr. Büthner showed me a letter published (some time in 1884) in a Belgian paper, *Le Mouvement Geographique*, in which the King of Kongo in a long preamble acknowledges His Majesty the King of Portugal as his liege lord, &c., &c. It was signed with the King's mark, and witnessed by all the white men in San Salvador, except myself. I told the Germans that I had heard nothing of the letter although I was in San Salvador on the day on which it was written and signed, and that I doubted its authenticity. Happening to visit the King a day or so later, I took the said letter with me, and asked him about it. He was astonished when he heard the contents of the letter, and in great anger he arose from the big leather chair in which he was sitting, and said, "My brother, the King of Portugal, sent me this chair as a present, and a short time after the head Padre brought me a letter to sign, saying it was a letter of thanks to the King of Portugal for this chair, and that is the only letter I ever signed my mark to, or ordered to be sent." Poor old man! in saying "Thank you" for a chair he had signed away the independence of his country: for the Portuguese used that letter as one of the arguments upon which they founded their claim to the ancient Kingdom of Kongo.

The head Portuguese Padre, a Portuguese trader, and a French trader had signed the letter as witnesses to the King's mark. A few days after my interview with the King I met the French trader, and told him I had seen the said letter, that I was in the town on that date, and was surprised that I was not asked to sign the letter, for "Am I not a white man?" The Frenchman excused himself by saying, "We did not ask you to witness the King's mark because we felt sure you would not do it until the King thoroughly understood the real purport of the letter." I thanked him for his estimate of my character, and gave him my view of the manner in which they had deceived and defrauded the King. One wonders how many treaties with African Kings have been gained by a like ruse.

On February 15, 1891, Dom Pedro V died of apoplexy, and in due time he was enshrouded in all the uniforms and expensive clothes given to him by the King of Portugal. Then came out the cloths that had been hoarded for years, styles and patterns long forgotten, introduced by traders fifty and sixty years before, which had filtered up from the coast to the far interior. From all the wealth he had gathered through a long reign nothing was saved from the grave, and the cost of his funeral, except the royal coat and robe, and the silver ware, which were considered crown property—everything else was buried to enrich their late owner in the spirit land.



## CHAPTER VI

### NATIVE GOVERNMENT AND LAWS

WE learn from various sources that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there was a strong native government that had its centre at San Salvador, and its circumference touched Kabinda in the north, Angola in the south, the Sea in the west, and in the east it reached nearly to Stanley Pool, and away towards the Kasai. In the eighteenth century this powerful native state gradually broke to pieces. The divisions into which the kingdom had been divided, and which had formerly been ruled by the sons and nephews of the King of Kongo (San Salvador), separated themselves from the central authority, and became independent of all control. These provinces also, in course of time, crumpled up, until at last every chief became a law unto himself and to the people of his village. The strong raided the weak, the rowdy bullies oppressed the quiet, peaceable folk, carrying them off to sell as slaves to the white men at the coast. Murders were common, and there was no one who cared to punish the murderers even if he had the power to do so. Anarchy reigned throughout the country, and men, women, and children were afraid to venture far from their towns and villages, for gangs of rascals were always on the prowl to snap up the undefended, who were at once sold from town to town until they found their way to the horrors of the slave hold on a white man's ship. Not a person thus caught and treated as a slave but was the child, the mother, the brother, the sister, the father, or the husband of someone left to mourn bitterly in the far-away hinterland for those who would never return.

In the early seventies of last century Besekele and Nkabi began a crusade against fetishes, charms, &c.; and they

also advocated some draconic laws to suppress the lawlessness then prevalent throughout the country. Their suggestions were accepted by village after village, and district after district; and it was enacted that all murders and attempts to murder should be punished by the death of the culprit, no matter of what rank he might be; and even murder in self-defence should be punishable by death, and if a man struck his mother he should be burnt to death on the market; that raids, violence, robbery, and kidnapping should be severely punished by the chiefs of the district.

They instituted a system of government called the carpet (*nkuru*), upon which a chief only may sit, and hence “carpet” became synonymous with lawful authority, and to “spread the carpet” (*yala e nkuru*) was to assume lawful authority; and to “destroy the carpet” (*bangulu e nkuru*) was to break the law, to commit a serious offence, and to bring about a state of anarchy. For one of the peculiarities of this mode of government is this: that when the law, say, against robbery is broken, destroyed, it no longer exists—it is dead, and anarchy reigns until the law is mended, is brought back to life, *i.e.* until the culprit who destroyed the law has paid the fine; hence the chiefs are forced to deal with cases quickly, and enforce payments of all fines at once, and thus restore the law, otherwise rascals would rob right and left on the plea that no law exists against robbery—it being dead, having been killed by the first thief who goes unjudged and unpunished. I have seen a whole district in tumult, and the chiefs and headmen hurrying to and fro to find and bring a law-breaker to judgment; and meanwhile, they were fearful that some rogues would take advantage of the fact that that law was dead.

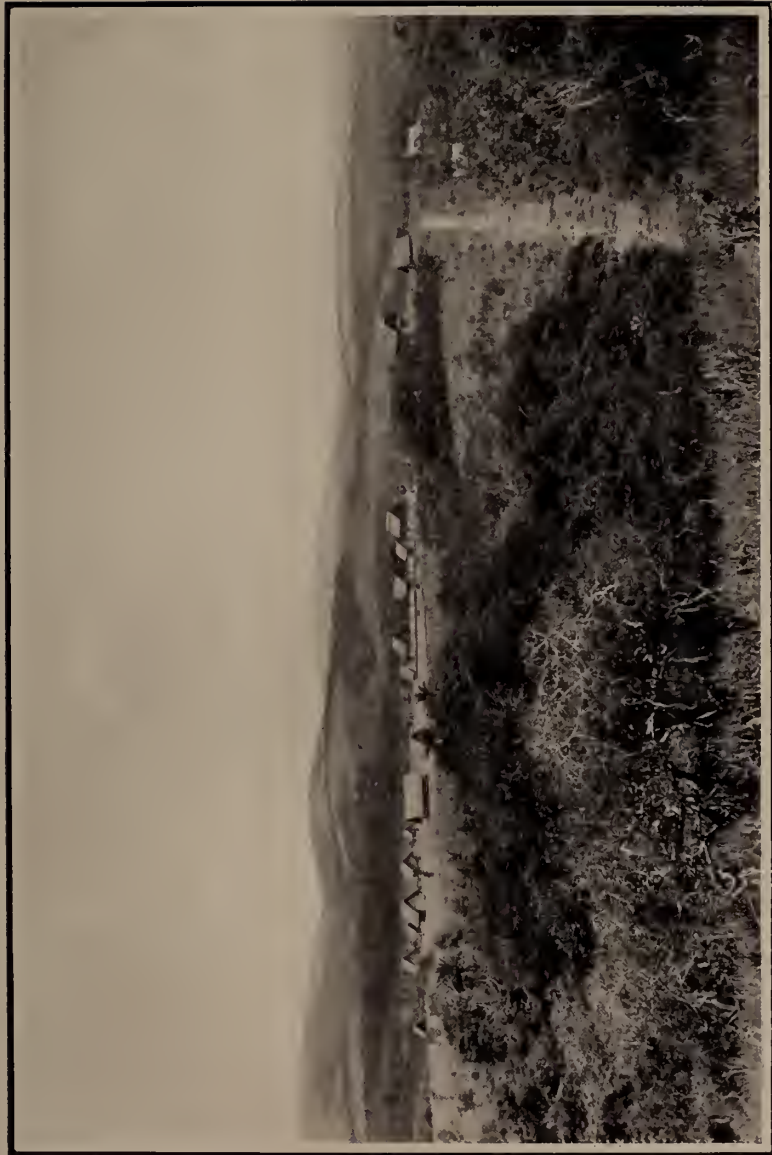
To promulgate a law the following method is observed: The greatest chief in the district assembles the chiefs of the surrounding villages, and tells them of the necessity for a new law to punish certain crimes that are being committed; he then informs them about the new law and its proposed penalties. If they agree to it, or to a modification of it, he

kills two or three pigs and divides the flesh among them as a witness that they have consented to the new law and its penalties. They then appoint a *nenkondo* (see page 47) to look after that law and to seek out the person who breaks it, and inflict the fine on him, which fine is eventually divided among the witnessing chiefs according to their status. The *nenkondo* can demand aid of any chief while enforcing the law.

After a law has been accepted the witnessing chiefs will adjourn to a cross road, and one of their number will state the law, and then lying on the ground he will rub his mouth in the dirt, and after striking his knees with the palms of his hands, he will invoke a curse, terrible in its nature, on the person who dares to break this law upon which the chiefs have just agreed. This has such a terrifying effect on the people that he will be a reckless fellow indeed who risks incurring the curse.

We will deal first with cases of homicide. If for any reason a man desires to kill another, he must first call the neighbouring chiefs together, and tell them what he wants to do, and his reasons for wishing to kill the said man. If they consent he presents them with a pig or two to kill and divide among themselves as a proof of their consent, and a guarantee of their support should he afterwards be accused of murder. This seems to be the only legal way to execute a person who has made himself impossible in his district by his violence and rascality.

The man who commits murder must be given up by his town and family if he has run to them for protection. He is tried by the chiefs, and, on being condemned, he is securely tied until the next market-day. The murderer is then taken to the crowded market and made drunk with palm wine; then the chief man of the district dances round him with a sword, and flashing and waving it about the culprit's head he makes a cut in the forehead, and on touching the prisoner for the third time, someone rushes out of the crowd, and cuts off the murderer's head, and his body is burnt to ashes. By reducing the body to ashes they believe that they thereby destroy his



*Photo by*

**VILLAGE IN FRENCH CONGO**

*Rev. R. L. Jennings*

This well illustrates the hilly character of the Lower Congo, the kind of site often selected for a village, the sort of houses built, and the narrow path made by the natives always walking in single file. The grass has been cleared from the path because it is near a village, but farther away the bush comes right up to the track.



spirit, and thus prevent the spirit from seeking revenge by bewitching his executioners.

If the murderer does not escape to his town, but runs elsewhere, then his family must hunt for him, and failing to capture him they must pay a fine of 20,000 strings of blue pipe beads. If the homicide is afterwards arrested and executed this heavy fine is not returned to the family, consequently a man does not run far unless he has a grudge against his family.

Should, however, the man be caught before or soon after he runs away his family pays a fine varying from 2,000 to 5,000 strings of beads, and on being proved guilty he forfeits his life in the manner already described. When captured the prisoner is handed over to the head chief of the district, and should the prisoner escape from him he is then entirely free from any further fear of capture or death. The family of the murdered man does not kill any member of the murderer's family, but they receive a portion of the fine inflicted (*nianga*) for homicide.

Should a free man kill a slave, he also forfeits his life. Mfumu Fofu, a chief near San Salvador, in pride killed his slave, and although he offered two slaves and a large sum of money they were refused, and he suffered the penalty of death. Mfumu Fofu's body, however, was not burned, as is the custom with the corpses of those executed for murder, but it was given to his family for burial.

Some years ago a certain chief ordered his slave to murder another chief, promising to protect him from punishment. The slave obeyed the order and killed his master's enemy. But at the trial it came out that the chief had instigated his slave to commit the murder, so he was beheaded and burnt, and the slave was made drunk, put in an old house, and burnt to death. In districts far removed from San Salvador there exists the custom of giving and accepting substitutes to bear the death penalty.

At one time accidental homicide was not regarded as anything but murder, and was treated accordingly; but of recent years it has been recognised, and the man guilty of such an



unfortunate accident pays a small fine to the family of the deceased as compensation, and then goes to a certain kind of medicine-man<sup>1</sup> to be made docile and careful.

In self-defence it is now permissible to take the life of a madman, but when possible a warning is sent to the family of the insane person to tell them to guard him more carefully, and if the family fail to do so the insane can be killed by any one whose life he threatens. Should the insane kill a person, the insane himself is not killed, but the family is forced to pay a ruinous fine for the blood shed. As these people have no asylums, and no chains for securely tying madmen, it is very difficult for them to look properly after such, and there is no doubt that the violently mad are often quietly poisoned, or removed by some other means. I have noticed that they suddenly disappear.

A person who commits suicide is not always buried, but the corpse is thrown out into the bush to be eaten by wild beasts. Sometimes they are buried at the cross roads.

There are many fetishes and charms whose aid is invoked to punish with foul diseases and death undiscovered thieves. Living as I have done for several years in closest touch with these Lower Congo natives, I can sincerely give them a character for honesty. There is a certain amount of pilfering of unconsidered trifles; but, in these later years, no cases of robbery from us. Among themselves in their ordinary town life they are fairly honest, and treating us, as they do, as belonging to themselves, they regard our goods with respect, and any who robbed us would be looked upon with contempt by his fellows. But there is no doubt that they thief from other white men when they have the opportunity, and the goods belonging to strangers, black or white, are considered their special perquisites if they can be appropriated with a fair chance of escaping detection and punishment.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ngang' a Lembe*, which see on p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> These remarks refer to ordinary natives, and not to Church members. A man or woman is expelled immediately from the Church for the slightest forgetfulness of the difference between *meum et tuum*.



This propensity for stealing is fully recognised by the traders, and to guard their goods they hire a native medicine-man to make a strong fetish for punishing thieves. This fetish is placed in a prominent position in their stores—generally opposite the door—and the store is more frequently known by the name of “fetish” than by that of store. Now unless these fetishes receive sacrifices of fowls and goats, *i.e.* unless their blood is poured periodically over them, the fetishes become powerless and inoperative, and every native knows and believes this, so although the fetish may restrain them for a time, yet after a few months, or even weeks, they will know it has no further power to work them any harm. On the other hand the native procures a fetish called *ebunge* to help him to successfully rob the trader, so after all they start level, one fetish counteracting the other.

The convicted thief must return the stolen article, or its equivalent, and as much again on top; and in addition he has to pay all the expenses of his trial. The receiver of stolen goods pays one half the fine; but if a man unwittingly buys a stolen article at a fair market value, and has witnesses to the transaction, he is held guiltless, and retains the article, or his money is returned.

A thief caught robbing a grave is either killed at once, and his (or her) blood poured over the grave as an oblation to the offended spirits, or else he is taken to the market and killed there. Sometimes the head is simply cut off on the market, and the carcass thrown into the bush or down a chasm; at other times the culprit's body is buried to the chin and exhibited thus at the market as an example to others, and towards evening his head is sliced off. The thing stolen may not be worth twopence; but the family of the person buried whose grave has been robbed is terrified lest the irritated spirit owning the grave should angrily visit them with some dire witchcraft.

To retain a runaway slave is considered a theft unless the slave “eats the goat” (which custom see, p. 72). If the escaped slave is held by folk of the same clan or a kindred clan to his

owner, the chiefs will meet and order the slave to be returned; and if this is not immediately done, the holder of the runaway slave is compelled to return him and pay another slave in addition as a fine. If, however, the slave has run away to another tribe the owner will inform the chiefs of the tribe concerning his escaped slave, and if he is not returned in a reasonable time reprisals are made on any of the goods and persons of the defaulting tribe.

In a charge of theft the accuser speaks first and is followed by his witnesses, then the accused and his witnesses. Having heard the case the judges take the witnesses of both parties aside and cross-examine them closely. If the accused objects to the verdict the court is broken up, and each side selects its own judge, and they, sitting together, try the case, and from their verdict there is no appeal. Sometimes the defendant will put two slaves in the circle and say: "If I am guilty take those slaves." Now if the plaintiff cannot put two slaves by their side he loses the case. I have seen a third and a fourth slave put as a stake, but as the other side could put slave for slave, the case went on. If the plaintiff had failed to meet slave with slave he would have lost. It was a sheer bit of bluff on the part of the defendant. If either the plaintiff or the defendant declines to take any oath proposed by his opponent it is regarded as a proof of guilt, and the verdict is given accordingly. Beyond being driven from the judgment place there is no punishment for a perjured witness.

Should a judge receive a bribe, and fail to secure a verdict for his client, he must return the bribe, and pay the fine inflicted on the briber—the loser of the case. Such a judge is called *nempemb' ewungu*, or the one who draws the whole affair on himself.

If two men quarrel and cut each other they both pay a fine to the *nsi* or country; but if one only is wounded the inflictor of the injury pays the fine. Should a man cut off another's arm, or destroy an eye, the fine (*nsiku*) is given to the chiefs who made, administered, and enforced the law against this offence. None of it is given in compensation to the

injured man; and if a pig is paid as the whole or part of the fine imposed, the wounded man receives a strip of meat from the belly part of the pig, the head is given to the offender, and the remainder is divided among the chiefs. Whenever a pig or a goat is paid as a fine the head of the animal goes to the person fined, and should he pay in francs, which is now frequently done, then two francs are returned as the "pig's head." In 1909 I judged a case of forgery and fined the man ten francs, and when he paid the fine a few days later he asked for the "pig's head." When a man falsely accuses another he must pay compensation to the accused. Their proverb runs: "If you put your neighbour's head in a plate, and it does not fit him, then the plate fits your head," *i.e.* you are guilty of what you accuse him, and must therefore pay up.

A stranger is entertained with house and food as long as he likes to stay, and on his leaving no presents are expected. I am afraid this is more theory than fact. If the visitor breaks the law he is driven away from the village, and if his clan is known to his entertainers they are asked to pay the damages. But when native traders sojourn in a town they are entertained, and on leaving they are expected to give presents to those from whom they have received hospitality.

A slave, if he has a generous master, may free himself by giving one slave in payment for himself to his owner; but as a rule two slaves—a male and a female—are demanded as compensation. For every third, sixth, ninth, and so on, journey a slave makes to the "coast" for trading purposes with his master, he receives pay, and these sums thus earned are absolutely his own. He saves the money, trades with it, and thus lays the foundation of that personal wealth by means of which he is able to redeem himself. As a married slave he receives extra pay for the above journeys.

The master has no rights over a slave's house, and no real claims to sleep with his slave's wife, although she is also his own slave; but some masters disregard this rule, and as a consequence the slaves do not respect their masters' wives. The descendants of slaves are slaves, but they are not sold

as freely as those recently acquired by the family. Failing heirs the master inherits his slave's property; but if the slave has a family they take the goods of their slave father, and if they are wise they give their master a fair share.

The children of a slave father by a free mother are free born, for mother-right is the recognised rule on the Lower Congo; but those by a free father and a slave mother are regarded as being above slaves, but below free men: for they have no family—their mother being a slave. When a female descendant of the family's slaves is given as a wife to a man to replace a daughter who has died, a present is given with her, lest she be regarded as a slave by her husband; and this present is called “a purifying of the blood” (*nsukulu a menga*), and this removes the slave element in her, and she is henceforth treated as a free woman.

There were several ways of collecting debts, of which the following indicate the worst evils of the old system, a system which is still in vogue in remote districts:

A creditor, too weak to enforce payment, transferred his credit to a stronger man, but not for more than the amount due. The new creditor then sent early one morning to the debtor's town, and as he stepped from his house he was caught, tied, and carried away; and if he could not pay the debt and an exorbitant sum as interest he was immediately sold into slavery.

If B owed A a debt which the latter could not recover after much dunning, A would wait his time and catch some people belonging to B, and to one of them he would give a fowl and a “hand” of plantain, and send him to B with news of the capture. If B did not then pay his debt and interest A had the right to refund himself by selling his captives as slaves. If A did not send a fowl and a “hand” of plantain to the debtor, he put himself in the wrong for not giving due notice of his action, and thus laid himself open to prosecution and a heavy fine. If A found that he had tied up the wrong people he presented his captives with a pig as compensation and set them free.

Another, but a roundabout method of procuring the settlement of a debt is as follows: A, the creditor, is a weak man, and the debtor B is a strong man, who would retaliate on A if the latter captured his people; but at the same time A wants his money and interest. A therefore ties up some people belonging to C, a very powerful man, and then sends C a fowl and a "hand" of plantain with a full explanation of the affair. Thereupon C goes to B and compels him to pay the debt with full interest, and what amount C likes on top to compensate himself and his people for their trouble and inconvenience. C would make no palaver with A, knowing he was well within his rights according to native custom. It would have been much cheaper for B to have settled with A rather than with C.

A few years ago a chief, Mampuya of Kinkuzu, called on me at Wathen station to request that a teacher be sent to his town. He seemed a very quiet, gentlemanly sort of man, and I was very much surprised to hear that he had not always been so deferential and modest, as the following incident in his life will show: Mampuya at one time treated the people of his town in a very contemptuous fashion, and was always extorting, on one plea or another, fowls, goats, and barter goods from them. At last they could bear his extortions no longer, so one day they bound him securely, and putting him on a shelf in his own house, they made a fire under him and sprinkled a quantity of red pepper on it, and went out, shutting the door closely behind them. The pungent smoke filled the hut, and Mampuya sneezed tremendously, and would have died if sufficient pepper had been thrown on the fire. After a time they took him out of the smoke, and tied a stick across his chest to his extended arms with the intention of punishing still further; but he paid a fine and made many promises of better behaviour, which promises he has thought well to fulfil, for the sneezing cure is far from pleasant.<sup>1</sup> The above treatment is also meted out to incorrigible pilferers and petty thieves.

<sup>1</sup> From *Congo Life and Folklore*, by the author. Religious Tract Society.



Most chiefs inherit their positions from their brothers or uncles, but in one town I know, Kakongo, they elected a new chief every year. Jealousy was the cause of this departure from ordinary custom. If a chief is tyrannical the people are not allowed to escape to another town. They may "teach" a chief to rule wisely and treat his people properly by the above-mentioned pepper cure, but they may not desert him.

They have a system of banking, or mutual help, called *temo*. Forty men, say, arrange to pay every certain market day an agreed sum, and the total on each market day is handed to one of their number to trade or do with as he pleases. Sometimes a number of young men will form such a club to find the marriage money for each in his turn. A failure to meet one's liability when due has often involved the defaulting party in slavery, and was in the old days a fruitful source of slave supply. I have known ten lads (and workmen also) club thus together to give each Saturday their ration money to one of their number. The result was that for one week in the ten they lived like princes, and for the other nine weeks they either starved or begged. Against this custom of clubbing their rations we set our faces most strongly, but at times it was too well concealed for us to discover it.

The following cases will clearly illustrate some points in native law: a pig belonging to the people of Lumweno, a town near Wathen, was killed by a Mansangi man on a farm belonging to the Mansangi people. The Lumweno folk demanded payment for the pig, but this was refused on the ground that any pigs found digging up cassava roots on a farm can be killed. After a time the Mansangi women went to work again on that particular farm, but their hoes were taken away by the Lumweno women, who were more numerous, and they claimed the land on the ground that a Lumweno pig had been killed on it and no compensation paid. The same evening the Mansangi chief sent a letter to the Lumweno chief. The messenger carried a gun, which was against native custom, and so the Lumweno people took the gun away from him, on the plea that "the messenger was bringing force into





#### CONGO NOBLES

The lad standing is a son of the late King, Dom Pedro V. The one with the sword is Dom Alvaro, a counsellor; and the other is the Kapitão who installed the nobles, see page 44. This photo was taken at St. Paul de Loando in the early eighties, when they were on an embassy to the Governor.



*Photo by*

#### AN ANCIENT FONT

*Dr. Mercier Gamble*

This was recently found near the ruins of the old cathedral, and probably dates back to the sixteenth century.



their town." The chiefs of the district settled the palaver by fining the Lumweno people one pig (worth 32s.) because they claimed land which did not belong to them, as the killing of a pig gave them no rights over the land on which it was killed; they also fined the Mansangi people one goat (worth 8s.) because the messenger had no right to carry a gun when he went to deliver a letter. This took place in 1909.

"In June 1908 Mayaji, a chief in the neighbourhood of Wathen, accused Makuka, a small chief, of committing adultery with one of his wives, and giving him a venereal disease by giving her 'medicine' to put on her husband. Mayaji waited until Makuka visited his town, and without any proper trial he caught him, and, shutting him in a house, he threatened to burn him in it. Some of Makuka's people, hearing of this, went to Mayaji's town unarmed (to have taken arms would have put them in the wrong), to see if they could release their chief. Mayaji made an attack on them with sticks and knives, and severely wounded five of them.

"The whole country side deprecates Mayaji's action, but before Makuka can fight Mayaji he must call the neighbouring chiefs together and lay his case before them, and if they consent to his fighting the other chief, he will give them some pigs to ensure their friendship and neutrality. They will see that no other chief goes to help Mayaji, or in that case they will take Makuka's side. By his pig's meat Makuka enters into an alliance with the consenting chiefs, and thus gains an open field and non-interference while he is fighting his enemy. It may take Makuka many months to collect the necessary pigs and lay in a stock of gunpowder; and when all is ready war will be declared." These notes were written at the time, but the fight never came off, as the affair was settled by a "palaver."

To keep a runaway wife is also regarded as a theft. If a wife runs to her family, they may keep her for a week or two while her husband's anger is cooling down; but they must then return her with a goat, or three fowls, and some native bread (*kwanga*), as a peace offering to the husband, even

though his ill-treatment may have caused her to leave him. If the woman absolutely refuses to return then the marriage money with large interest—from 300 to 500 per cent.—is refunded to the man; but if the husband is notoriously cruel, public opinion will force him to accept the marriage money without any interest whatever.

The following incident came under my notice while living in San Salvador: I treated a woman for a severe cut on the shoulder, and on inquiry I found that she was the wife of a neighbouring chief, who, when asked by his wife for permission to visit another town, knocked her down and cut her with a knife. A man may beat his wife as much as he likes, but if he draws even a little blood he is liable to a heavy fine. This woman came to the King for protection, and when she had been in the town two or three days, the King sent to the husband, demanding a heavy amount in beads, which the husband paid; but when the King sought to return the woman she was not to be found, for she had escaped to another chief. As his majesty had taken up the matter, had received the fine, and the woman was in his charge, he had either to procure the return of the woman from the chief to whom she had fled, or compensate the husband with another woman in her place. The King, after some considerable trouble, and the payment of a part of his profits, was able to send the woman back to her husband. This law, however, makes a man guard and control his passions, and also deters folk from interfering in the quarrels of others. She was a free woman; but if she had been a slave a few cuts more or less would not have troubled anyone.

In connection with slaves there is a custom that somewhat ameliorates their condition by ensuring for them decent treatment and proper consideration. A slave badly treated by his master may run off to another, who will, he thinks, use him more kindly. On arrival before the selected chief he kneels before him and pays homage, saying, "I have come to you because my master does many bad things to me. Will you accept of me?" If the chief listens to him and decides to accept of him, he kills a goat, and they eat a portion of it

together. This is a token that the chief has agreed to accept him. Guns are fired and the people shout "Nkombo! Nkombo!" (Goat! Goat!), and all the town is jubilant because of the event.

On the next market day the chief takes him and shows him on the market as one who has eaten his goat, and is no longer a slave. The old master must accept the ordinary market value of his former slave: and he is not allowed to take him again, or buy him for any amount of money. The whilom slave takes his name from the ceremony of eating the goat, and is henceforth called Nkombo (Goat). He is not the slave of the man who gave him the goat, but is practically a free man. These "Goats" are very highly appreciated by chiefs, as they generally become very faithful followers of those with whom they have eaten the goat. Some chiefs buy costly charms for the purpose of attracting these "Goats" to them.

## CHAPTER VII

### LANGUAGE, IDIOMS, AND PROVERBS

ON arriving at San Salvador in February 1882 we had placed in our hands a list of words that had so far been collected. The Mission was very young, scarcely more than two years old; and much time had been spent in trying to open a road to Stanley Pool, strength had been expended in establishing means of regular communication with a suitable base on the river, and with developing the transport. Besides, there had been frequent fevers, and death had not been idle, therefore it was not surprising that the number of words collected was very small, and many were incorrect; that there were no grammar notes, and in fact very little to help a new arrival in learning the native language.<sup>1</sup>

We found, however, some headmen who knew Portuguese, and as a Portuguese Grammar and Dictionary were in those days a part of our outfit, and we had been employing the tedious seven weeks of our voyage in studying that language, we set to work to familiarise ourself more thoroughly with it, that we might use it as a medium for delivering the message we had gone so far to preach. If any of my readers have ever employed interpreters under the same conditions, *i.e.* both the

<sup>1</sup> The late Dr. Bentley was the linguist of the pioneer party, and to him all new words and their definitions, all grammar notes, &c., were given by his colleagues; and at this time he had in his possession a good vocabulary of words, and many grammar notes, all in manuscript, which he afterwards embodied in his monumental work, *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language*, Trübner & Co., 1887. Dr. Bentley remained, until the time of his lamented death in 1905, the philologist and translator *par excellence* in the Lower Congo language; but at the time of which the author writes, Dr. Bentley was living several days' journey from San Salvador, and had all his MSS. with him. What he did for the Lower Congo language others have done for the various languages on the Upper Congo.



speaker and the interpreter using a language not their own, they will appreciate our difficulty; and when it is remembered that the interpreters were ignorant of the new ideas to be imparted, and were utterly indifferent to them, it will be obvious that our difficulties were greatly increased. No matter how warmly the words might well up from our own hearts, they lost their warmth, grip and force as they issued from the lips of our unsympathetic interpreters.

By-and-by as we became better acquainted with the language, we discovered that our interpreters, who were native traders, often gave the congregation an account of their journeys to and from the "coast," their views respecting the manner in which the various white traders treated their native customers, and a comparison of the prices of trade goods at the different trading establishments. We remonstrated with them, and they readily admitted their delinquencies and glibly promised amendment; but the climax was reached when one Sunday morning the interpreter solemnly gave the audience an account of a wonderful snake that was "nearly long enough to go all round the town." It was a marvellous story! and we could see from the eyes and faces of the congregation that the details were most thrilling. We never used those Portuguese interpreters again; but bent our minds more assiduously than ever to gain a proper knowledge of the people's tongue.

The Kisi-Kongo language, with more or less dialectical differences, is spoken over a very wide area, stretching from Loango in the north to Angola to the south, and from the sea coast to within twenty miles of Stanley Pool—probably co-extensive with the ancient Kingdom of Kongo. More than fourteen thousand root words have already been collected, and these with their derivatives give a working vocabulary containing between sixty and seventy thousand words, all expressing some definite shade of meaning. That a people should employ such a large number of words is no small proof of their mental calibre, for it must be borne in mind that these words were *in use*, or they would have been forgotten, as there has been no literature, until recently, in which to preserve them and keep alive their meanings.

So much has been written and published on Bantu languages that the student who desires to probe deeply into the subject has now at his disposal such a number of books as would form, if collected, no mean library; we propose, therefore, only to give in a few paragraphs some of the salient points that will be of interest to the general reader.

The late Dr. Bentley, in his introduction to his *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language*, gives a graphic description of its reduction to writing, the discovery of the rules, all unconsciously employed, by which the natives speak their splendid language, and the difficulties he encountered. Kisi-Kongo, like all Bantu dialects, is alliterative in the construction of its sentences, *i.e.* that the prefix of the nominative noun of the sentence becomes the prefix of all the words dependent on it, *e.g.* :

<i>kinkutu</i>	<i>kiame</i>	<i>kiampwena</i>	<i>kiambote</i>
coat	my	large	good
<i>kiandombe</i>	<i>kiavididi</i>	<i>ezono</i>	<i>kisolokele</i>
black	it lost	yesterday	it has turned up.
= My large, good, black coat which was lost yesterday has turned up.			

The singular prefix *Ki* of the first word, which is the nominative noun, becomes the initial prefix of the words in subjection to it. If it had been plural, it would have been *yinkutu yame yampwena*, &c.=coats my large, &c. Though difficult at first to master, and the cause of many ludicrous and annoying slips, yet it makes for clearness of meaning.

There are fifteen classes of alliterative concord, and all the nouns in the language belong to one or other of these classes; and immediately the class to which a noun belongs is known, its pronominal prefixes, its possessive and demonstrative pronouns, &c., are easily constructed by the fixed rules of usage, and the plural form is also readily recognised. There are twenty-nine ways of saying good, bad, black, great, and every other adjective in the language, *i.e.* every adjective has a different singular or plural form according to the par-

ticular class to which the noun that it qualifies belongs, *e.g.* *dinkondo* (plantain) is a noun of the eighth class, and "good" in that class is *diambote* (plur. *mambote*), but *lubu* (mosquito) belongs to the eleventh class, and "good" in that class is *luambote* (plur. *twambote*); and thus through all the classifications into which the nouns may be divided. The fifteenth class is the diminutive and has no plural, hence there are twenty-nine forms instead of thirty.

The verb is very complicated, and to set it out with any clearness would demand more space than we can afford in a work that is not a grammar. Suffice it to say, that it is rich, flexible, and expressive; and that the finest shades of thought can be clearly indicated, and no practical difficulty has been experienced in translating the New Testament and other books, as the *Pilgrim's Progress*, into the language. It has an active (*baka*=to catch), a passive (*bakwa*=to be caught), a middle voice (*bakama*=to get caught). It has a prepositional form (*bakila*=to catch for, or with), a causative (*bakisa*=to cause to catch), a reciprocal (*bakana*=to catch one another), a repetitive (*bakulula*=to catch again and again), a reversive (*bakula*=to uncatch=to let loose), a reflexive (*kubaka*=to catch oneself); and sometimes three or four of these forms are found in combination with a single verb, *e.g.* *kangujianisina*=to cause to untie one another for, or with.

The idiomatic use of many of its words and phrases make not only for picturesqueness of speech, but also afford an interesting glimpse of the native way of looking at things; and the foreigner must master these idioms before he can hope to be clearly and easily understood by the people. The following are a few of their picture-words: the italics are literal translations of native words and sentences. If a person asks a question it is no use to say in Congo that you will think over it and give a reply in a day or two, for such words would not be understood; but if you say that you *will drink water, and will vomit the water in one or two days* you will be immediately understood. To consider a matter is *to drink water*, and to give an answer is *to vomit the water* you are

supposed to have drunk. The verb *to see* takes the place of our verb to feel, hence they *see hunger, see shame, see tiredness, see cold, &c.*

When speaking about the emotions and feelings various figures of speech are employed that are both forcible and expressive: the *heart stands up* when one is afraid; to be contented is to have the *heart levelled down*, and to soothe or comfort a person is to *knock down his heart*, i.e. to level it down to where it should be. A person expresses his disappointment by saying that his *heart is bent backwards*; to be determined about anything is to have the *heart tied to the object*; our colloquial phrase "to be in a stew" has its counterpart in the words that *the heart has been put on the fire*; *the heart stutters* is the equivalent for vacillation; to be perfectly frank, hiding nothing, is *to cut open the heart*; and to be sorry for one's evil doings is *to turn the heart round*.

There are also many interesting expressions used about anger, and a few examples will illustrate their aptness. To be sulky or sullen is to have *anger insufficiently cooked*; one with a hasty temper is said *to pull out his anger*; and of a person who habitually loses his temper it is said, that he is a *native of the town of Lose-your-temper*. An eel (*nsomvi*) is supposed to possess a very small stomach which is quickly and easily filled, hence a person quick to anger is said *to have the stomach of an eel*.

To have a pleasant outward appearance is spoken of as *flattery of the eyes*; to be dumbfounded is *to be tied up*; and to be unable to refute an argument finds expression in the phrase, *You have drunk the palm-wine*; to talk incessantly is *to cause words to come in crowds*, and one who contradicts himself *talks in smears and blots*; a person who uses obscure language is said *to have his words locked up*, and evasion is *to talk in halves*. To support or agree to a matter is *to push on the water bottle*; and to refuse utterly to give attention is *to expel the request from the ears* by shaking them violently and noisily as a dog or goat does: the word for this kind of absolute refusal is the same as that used to describe the flap, flap of the ears when a dog, or goat shakes its head violently to drive away the flies.

The feeling of weakness or cramp in the legs after an illness, is stated by the saying, *My legs have been nibbled*, as though a mouse had been at them; a thoughtless action which involves great loss is likened to *the wickedness of a fly* that alights for a moment on a carcase, and thus causes it to go rotten very soon—a small action leading to irreparable consequences. To shame a person is *to grind their self-respect into small pieces* so that it will not cover them; and to humiliate a person is *to weed up their pride*, and *to weed up a person's anger* is to conciliate him.

A cross-eyed person is said to have his *eyes ajar*; and the rays of light streaming from behind a dark cloud *are the legs of the sun*. *Did you ask permission to be where you are?* is a wise way of stating, "I have as much right here as you"; and one who acquires a fashion, or conforms to a new condition of things is said to have *swallowed them*, they have become so much a part of himself. When an event takes place the reason for which is hidden, the perplexed person says, *One and three, but there is something in the middle*, i.e. there is a word missing, or the cause of these actions is obscure.

Sometimes we come across puns, or a play upon words. The word for hunger (*nzala*) is the same as for finger-nails, and *They gave me a good knife to cut my nails* is used as the equivalent for, "They gave me nice food to cut (*satisfy*) my hunger." Again, the word for horns (*mpaka*) stands also for objection, and when two bullocks, brow to brow, are shifting their horns about to get a grip and thus push one another down, the identical phrase, *To move the horns about*, is used of two men having an argument—moving their objections about to floor each other in the discussion.

The wit and wisdom of a people are often found in their proverbs—those crisp sayings expressed by one which crystallise the experience of the many. One writer calls them "the hob-nailed philosophy of the people;" and another says that "proverbs are the daughters of daily experience." An African tribe does not lack experiences because it is savage, and it speaks well for their intellectual acuteness that we find so numerous a progeny of such "daughters" existing in the



Lower Congo language. The probability is that many "daughters" have died at birth, for until missionaries went there the people were without a written language in which to preserve the offsprings of their fancy, or record the birth of a witty or pointed aphorism.

A proverb loses much of its obviousness, and not a little of its terseness and force, by translation into another language; and when the translation is made from an African language into a European one the difficulty is somewhat increased. The environment of the black man, his point of view, his habit of thought, and his superstitions, touching as they do every part of his life, all tend to make it anything but easy to place a white man in such a position that he will at once appreciate the full flavour of some of the African proverbs. For this reason a large number of them will never be translated into any European tongue, as they would demand a long, close study of the black man's life, and a clear understanding of what is at the back of the black man's mind, to appraise their wit and philosophy. Still there are some that are translatable, as they do not demand any special knowledge on the part of an English reader to catch their purport, or understand their teaching, and the following is an attempt to put a few of them on record in an English dress.

A blustering, boastful, conceited man is wisely reminded that the *cocks that crow have only come from eggs*; and when a man of no importance, a man who thinks far more of himself than other folk think of him, gets up in a palaver and gives utterance to "tall talk" until he has bored nearly everybody, a chief pointing at him will say, *There is a little fowl trying to lay a big egg*. I have seen this proverb used with crushing effect, and it was many a day before the man ventured to speak again at a palaver. A shallow, foolish person who, although he is beaten in an argument, continues to speak for the sake of hearing himself talk, is told that he is *like an onion leaf, green and smooth outside but empty inside*; and a man who knows he is wrong but will not accept the arguments of his opponents is said to be *a sick man who refuses medicine because he feels that death is drawing near*. But when a man



is defeated in a discussion, and has nothing more to say in his own defence, he uses the expression, *You have shot me in the legs; if it had been in the head I should run away*, i.e. you have caught me this time; and when a person has no excuse to offer for a wrong done, he is said to be *like a monkey that blows out its cheeks because it has nothing to say*.

Fussy, self-important folk, who desire more consideration than their position demands, are to be found in Africa as in other parts of the world. To such people the following plain question is put: *You are a crab with only ten legs and you want to travel in a hammock, but I am a millepede with a thousand legs; in what shall I travel?* i.e. do not think so much of yourself when there are greater folk present. When a disagreeable, contentious person treats his friends badly, he is asked: *The partridge is your enemy, and the cock is your enemy; who will tell you of the approach of dawn?* The people, having neither watches nor clocks, are dependent on these and other birds for heralding the coming dawn; and the proverb means that if you make everybody an enemy who will help you in the hour of need.

The principle that men should be first and boys after, or respect for elders, is inculcated by the phrase, *The elders wear the cloth first, then the boys get the rags*. And the young folk are exhorted not to laugh at a man who slips down, literally or otherwise, by the saying, *A full-grown man may fall, for his beard is not made of props*. A dissatisfied, restless boy is told that *A silly mouse may leave its hole in anger, but that does not change it into a rat*. When a lad is travelling with a caravan, and has been on the road some days, he begins to feel the pinch of hunger, through the scantiness of daily rations, and boylike he complains of his hunger; but the elders of the party pertinently ask him, *Can you carry your house with you and leave your stomach at home?* No, one must have his stomach wherever he goes, therefore he must put up with the inconveniences of it. If a boy is punished for stealing, and he is tempted again soon after, he will reply to his tempter, *A big toad can blow four trumpets, but the first one I blew made my eyes bulge out*, i.e. a big rogue may be reckless, but a small one must think of the

consequences—you remember what a punishment I suffered for stealing, I don't want any more.

“When the cat is away the mice will play,” is expressed thus: *When the leopard has left they eat his cubs*, or, *In the town that has no cat the mice play with the dogs' bells*. “He cut off his nose to spite his face” is put in this form: *He burnt his house in anger, and now he has nowhere to sleep*. And our proverb of “There is many a slip between the cup and lip” has its fellow on the Congo in the saying that *The pot that would have cooked the antelope is broken*. The lesson of impartiality is enforced thus: *If twins are born to you don't despise the other of the two*; and the impossibility of doing two things at once is shown in that *A dog has four legs yet it cannot walk in two roads*, therefore you cannot expect me with only two legs to do what a dog with four never attempts. *A load of salt on another man's head is easily carried*, expounds a truth readily acknowledged by all, that we bear lightly the burdens carried by others; and the evils of procrastination are well exemplified by the sayings, *You waited until the sun rose before you pulled your blanket over you*, and, *You set the trap after the rat had passed*, i.e. you have postponed until it is too late what you should have done earlier.

Gossiping is not encouraged, for it works as much harm there as here, consequently a person is told, *If you receive a message deliver it, but if you are only told an affair leave it where you heard it*. *He is a talker who turns the king-post round* is said of one whose word is not to be trusted, and such a one is also described as *possessing two mouths*. When a man is reminded of a wrong he has committed, and goes off in wrath, some one will call after him, *The bald-headed man leaves in anger (when told of his baldness), but will he grow any hair where he goes?* i.e. will a man's customs be changed because he leaves his friends in anger when told of some foolish or evil thing he has done?

*A woman likes the meat, let her have the bones*, i.e. a person who breaks the law should also bear the penalty—the one should go with the other. When a palm-nut is eaten it leaves a reddish-yellow smear of oil round the mouth, hence when a

person suffers for the wrong doings of another, the proverb runs: *The fish-eagle eats the palm-nuts but the lizard has the reddish mouth*; this refers to the Kolombo lizard, which has a reddish tinge round the mouth. *He who cleared the long grass from the road opens the way for next comers*, i.e. the one who first commits a wrong opens the way for those who come afterwards, and his action is the more worthy of condemnation. That judges should be merciful in dealing out justice is taught in the proverb, *If a leopard gives birth to a palm-rat she does not eat it*, i.e. you should have punished me for breaking your laws, but you should not have destroyed me, for I am born into your clan. When a person is convicted because he belongs to a clan other than that of which the judge happens to be a member, the folk standing round will say, *In a court of fowls the cockroach never wins his case*, i.e. the verdict of one race or one clan concerning another is not altogether free from bias, and should be received with caution—the fowls always eat the cockroaches when they see them.

Foolishness in all its various aspects has its own set of proverbs to ridicule and condemn it. An utterly stupid person is likened to *a blind man who puts rotten nuts in a bag full of holes and then takes a dead road*, i.e. a blind alley. What combination of ideas thrown together can more fittingly describe a gross bungler? About a man who is smitten with the appearance of a woman and pays the marriage money for her without knowing anything of her temper, or her ability as a cook or farm worker, the proverb is used, *The mouth bought the pepper, but was surprised at the burning pain*—the burning sensation that comes from eating peppers that are pretty to look at but are as hot as fire to the taste. When a man either through carelessness, deceit, or stupidity pretends, or does not know what he really should know, he is told, *The hair belongs to your head, yet you don't know when it was cut off*. Our saying that a fool learns by experience is thus stated: *The fool who wishes to be thought wise sets fire to the village grass*, and so burns down the village; and the phrase that *the head drives, the legs go*, indicates utter thoughtlessness.

Should a person be disheartened in an undertaking and

wish to abandon it because of some small difficulty he has encountered, he is asked, *If you are building a house and a nail breaks, do you stop building or change the nail?* That there is no royal road to learning is fully recognised even in Africa, as shown by the following proverb: *Wisdom is not a medicine to be swallowed.* The native huts are thatched with a special kind of grass, and everybody tries to procure it as long as possible, but sometimes, for various reasons, only short grass is to be found, and this lack of choice is used as a proverb equal in force to our English one, "Beggars must not be choosers," and it is as follows: *If you reject the short grass you will be left in the rain.* When a prominent man in a village acts ungenerously towards a little man, the latter says, *It is on a small place that one practises a new dance*, i.e. It is well for you that you tried that trick on me, for if you had treated an equal in the same way he would have retaliated.

The Congo folk are not so slow of wit as to pass unnoticed that universal trait of human nature that urges a man to humble himself in order to attain a desired end, which we often express in the phrase "He stoops to conquer," and they state it in the proverb, *To enter a calabash the frog makes itself very small*, but once inside it blows itself out so that you cannot expel it. This proverb was often used of the now defunct Congo Free State, which, in the early years of its existence, "went about the country smiling, talking suavely, and giving presents on the slightest excuse, and afterwards turned round and oppressed the people"—it got into the calabash and the people could not drive it out. The idea of substituting "a sprat for a mackerel" is embodied in the saying, *When we have drunk palm-wine you are too smart in putting the bitter nut for the kola nut.* The kola nut is rare, dear, and greatly prized as a pick-me-up after a bout of drinking, and there are other nuts just as bitter as the kola nut, but, lacking its medicinal properties, they are valueless as pick-me-ups; and anyone conferring a small benefit in hope of gaining a great advantage, or anyone trading, &c., who tries to give an inferior article in place of a better is said to be giving a bitter nut (*ngadiadia*) as a substitute for the kola nut (*makazu*).



On the Lower Congo the leopard is the king of beasts, and is always spoken of with respect as lord, chief, &c., and the saying that *When the leopard becomes poor he eats mud* depicts a strong, important man reduced in circumstances, or weakened by disease, so that the "small fry" of the town trifle with him and treat him with contempt. A man may be masterful and much feared outside his own house and family, or as a chief outside his own town, but among his kith and kin he may not be much esteemed, hence the proverb, *The leopard's cub does not respect his father's marks*. An oily face is a sign of beauty, and the native words for father's sister literally mean female-father, hence the force of the following proverb: *The toad has an oily face in the presence of his father's sister*, i.e. a person is always beautiful to his nearest relatives, and they are ever ready to excuse his faults and irregularities.

Things are not always what they seem, and appearances are somewhat misleading. The man who walks through the village in an old cloth, with skin unoiled, and body rough for lack of the camwood cosmetic, may possibly be a man of importance in the place from whence he comes, for *The garden egg possesses no clan, split it open and behold* it is full of seeds, and consequently has a large family. A state officer may be insignificant to look at, and have only a few soldiers with him, but if you touch him you discover that he has the whole of the Government's power behind him.

The above proverbs and sayings are typical of many that are still untranslated which touch on every phase of human life, thought, and experience. Of course in village life these proverbs are applied in scores of different ways only slightly indicated in the above explanations, for every proverb lends itself to a variety of applications. We trust that in the unfolding of these proverbs the readers will recognise that these uncultured, backward people of the Congo possess some keenness of intellect, a power of observation, and a felicity of expression that augur well for their future progress in civilisation.

## CHAPTER VIII

### NATIVE FOODS, DRINKS, AND MANUFACTURES

“WHAT do the Congo people eat?” is a question that has often been put to me while travelling about England; and it would be easy to answer that cassava prepared in one of several different ways is the staple food for all the Lower Congo peoples, and of a large proportion of those who live on the Upper Congo; that palm kernels, peanuts, plantains, bananas, sweet potatoes, yams, and maize are eaten as snacks through the day to allay their hunger until the evening meal is ready, which is *the* meal of the day; that palm oil, pumpkin seeds, crushed red peppers with peanuts, and various leaves pounded, cooked, and mixed with palm oil serve as condiments or sauces to render their sour bread (*kwanga*), or cassava flour pudding more palatable and tasty. But I fear in answering thus the inquirer would gain very little information.

“What is cassava, and how is it prepared?” would be the next questions. The cassava plant is a native of South America, and has now penetrated to most tropical countries. It is very rich in nutritive properties, and tapioca and starch are two of its products so well known in all civilised lands. By the Brazilians it is known as *mandioca*, and it was probably introduced into Congo by the Portugese during the sixteenth century where it is known as *madioka*. Manioc and cassava are its alternate names in English, but the latter is the West Indian name for the tapioca made from the manioc roots. There are two kinds of manioc—the sweet or non-poisonous, and the bitter, which contains much hydrocyanic or prussic acid in its milky juice. This poison, however, is dissipated by heat in preparing the root for food.



The bitter kind is the more popular because it yields the better results in cultivation. While the sweet sort is simply peeled and steamed and is then a good substitute for potatoes, the tubers of the bitter kind are soaked for a few days in pools, streams, or water-holes until they are soft. These water-holes smell so abominably from the constant soaking of the roots in them that white men lose all desire to sample the "bread" and puddings made from the roots that have been taken from them.

After due soaking the roots are taken from the water-holes, peeled, cored, and kneaded well to the consistency of a smooth dough. Lumps of this dough about the size of a melon are enswathed in large leaves and thoroughly steamed until well cooked. Sometimes the dough is done into sausages of various sizes according to the custom of the locality, or into "ropes" from six to fifty feet in length, and about one and a half inches in diameter. These are also wound round with leaves and well steamed in large pots. Native bread (*kwanga*) prepared in this way will remain good for many days, and should the outside become mildewed, it can be trimmed and the inner part will be wholesome. These "loaves" vary in price considerably, but an average market rate is about 200 lbs. for 4s., and 4 lbs. are more than sufficient *per diem* for a full-grown man.

In the preparation of the manioc flour, the roots, after being soaked, peeled, split, and cored, are spread on stones or small platforms in the sun until properly dry. The pieces are then laid on shelves over their house fires until friable, and thus they are easily pounded in a mortar, sifted through a fine native sieve, and the result is a clean, white flour. When the housewife desires a soft pudding, she puts a pot of water on the fire, and when it boils she gradually sprinkles the flour into the water, meanwhile stirring the mass slowly with a stick, and a *luku* pudding is the result. The eater breaks off a piece of this pudding, rolls it in his fingers, dips it into a soup or gravy, raises it, and lets it slip down his throat without any masticating, for if he attempts to bite

it, the pudding will stick to his teeth like soft toffee. The *kwanga* loaves are made for journeys; but the *luku* puddings are eaten fresh at their evening meals, and it is surprising the enormous quantities they can put away. The distended stomachs of native children are due to the coarseness and indigestibility of these puddings.

If the housewife has neither fish nor meat with which to make gravy to ease down the pudding, she will pluck some manioc leaves, and finely mince them on a corrugated board, or toothed stick, and cook them with palm oil, and thus make a palatable dish in which to dip the pudding. Sometimes a dish of beans or pumpkin seeds is boiled until well mashed; and these dishes are much appreciated, as they add considerable relish to their insipid pudding or sour bread.

When a fairly well-to-do man is travelling he takes with him as a relish to eat with his *kwanga* bread, either white-bait sun-dried and pressed into cakes, or a relish made by crushing strong red peppers and peanuts together. A little of this goes a long way, and if it is not very filling, it tickles the palate, and gives a sense of warmth and comfort to the internal machinery. White ants also are caught in large numbers, and make a sauce which is greatly in favour with many.

Their various modes of cooking are, stewing, steaming, boiling, grilling in the ashes (binding the meat or fish in leaves and dropping the bundle among the red-hot embers of the fire—the food is thoroughly cooked long before the leaves are burnt through, and foods treated in this way retain their full flavours; it is really paper-bag cookery with leaves for paper); and lastly roasting by putting a spit through the article, and turning it over and over above a good fire. For the steaming process a large saucepan is placed on the fire and half filled with water, a strainer is fixed in the saucepan and the food arranged on it, some sections of plantain leaves are laid over the food, and a pot of the same size as the first is put over leaves and food, and pressed down until the rims of the two saucepans meet.



*Photo by*

#### MAKING A PAPYRUS MAT

*Rev. W. Wooding*

These mats are used for lining walls to make them wind-tight, as mattresses for their bamboo beds, and as large baskets for carrying pea-nuts, etc. to the traders. The papyri are cut in the swampy valleys, dried in the sun, and are either threaded on strong string or laced together.



The people as a rule have only one meal a day, and that is not taken until just after sunset—between 6.30 and 7 P.M.; but from the quantity of food that disappears on that occasion they make up apparently for lost time. During the day they stave off hunger with a roasted plantain and a few peanuts, or with a banana or two, or a piece of sugar-cane, or a lump of native bread, &c. Sweet potatoes are regarded as very inferior food, in fact only fit for women. No one thinks that he (or she) has had a meal unless he sits down to a large *luku* pudding, and something to help it down. Carriers go for days on snacks, looking to their return to their own town, after the journey is over, for a proper meal. In the early eighties the males of the family ate by themselves, and the females by themselves, and out of sight of the men. The men thought it beneath their dignity to eat with the women, so the women took what the men did not want and ate it alone. This custom in some districts is fast disappearing, and it is now no uncommon thing to see a man sitting in his house at the same table with his wife and children.

It is the woman's duty to provide all the vegetable food for herself, her children (if she has any), and partly keep her husband, should she be a member of a polygamist's menage; and her husband supplies the meat or fish. If there is neither to eat at the late dinner, the man cannot blame his wife; he has simply failed to give them to her, and he must, therefore, content himself with the pudding and dish of oil and leaves, or any other appetiser his wife may concoct by her culinary art. The polygamist lives with each of his wives in turn for two or more days according to arrangement with them, and he then finds the meat or fish for the evening meal cooked by the wife with whom he is living; and he must be generous, as his wife for the time being expects her share of the dainty.

Nothing comes amiss to the native in the way of eating. Goats, sheep, pigs, and fowls are domesticated; and he is a poor man who cannot occasionally buy a little meat, or afford



to feast on one of his own fowls. Elephants, buffaloes, antelopes, palm rats, field rats, and moles are shot or trapped in farms and forests. Hippopotami, monitors, and crocodiles are rare on the Lower Congo, but they are caught sometimes; and fish abound in the streams. Snakes, river tortoises, white ants, locusts, grasshoppers, certain caterpillars, and palm-maggots are eaten with relish, and are regarded among the dainties of life. Hawks, kites, fish-eagles, pelicans, parrots, and monkeys are not despised; but after a brief visit to the pot find their way to the mouths of the fortunate hunters. The menu is varied, and includes almost everything, for what one person under a taboo is prohibited from eating, another will eat with gusto.

The natives are scrupulously careful in the division of food. When eating together from the same saucepans, each one is careful not to take more than his fair share, otherwise he will soon be known as a greedy fellow, and folk will avoid eating with him. If anything is to be divided among a certain number of people, one of them is appointed to divide the article—say a piece of meat—into equal parts according to the number of persons to be benefited; and all those who are to have a share of the meat take theirs first, and the divider takes the last share left, hence he is very careful that all the shares are as near alike as possible. This is a common practice among all the tribes with which I have mixed.

Savages are often regarded as gluttons, but when it is remembered that they really have only one square meal a day; that when on journeys they live in the poorest and scantiest fashion possible; that they go long periods without a good feed of meat; it is not a matter of surprise that the evening meal is a large one, and that on some special occasions, such as a wedding or a funeral, they eat freely and expansively of the foods put before them. The natives think the white men are great eaters, because they sit down to at least three meals a day, whereas they only sit down to one.

There is not a great variety of native drinks from which to select—there are only palm-wines (*malavu*), and beer (*mbamvu*).



Of the former there are various qualities and flavours according to the age, &c., of the palms from which the wine is collected. There is *malavu mansamba*, which is procured by cutting the base of the flower of the living palm (*Elæis Guinæensis*) and inserting a reed so that the rising sap percolates through the reed into a calabash fixed to the palm; then there is *malavu mesoka*, which is got from the heart of the palm and not from the flower base; then *malavu mambuhu*, which is taken from a fallen palm by cutting a hole in the trunk, and the sap flows into this hole and is scooped out, but the supply is very short in duration, as the sap quickly dries up. When the wine is old and sour it is called *dikaya*; and when not more than twelve hours old it is *malavu manswa* or fresh wine. And the last kind of wine is *malavu matombe*, taken from the bamboo (*Raphia vinifera*), of which in some valleys there are large quantities growing. These wines, when drunk fresh and unfermented, are exceedingly refreshing; but the natives prefer them fermented—and they generally are fizzing with fermentation by three or four o'clock in the afternoon, and then they are intoxicating. When the writer was living in San Salvador there was an oldish man who had several gin-bottles, holding rather less than a pint, and these he kept filled, and so arranged them that every evening he had one that was about a week old, and that was enough to make him thoroughly drunk and quarrelsome. He became such a nuisance with his shouting and squabbling that the King ordered him out of the town, and as the man was slow in obeying, he sent some of his people to pull the man's house down and conduct him out of the town, which they did.

Tapping the palms for wine is quite a trade by itself. It requires a special knowledge of palms, and great agility in climbing, which is accomplished by means of hoops that the tapster passes round the trunk of the palm-tree and around his own waist. The roughness of the trunk affords his naked feet a grip on the tree, and as he ascends he throws himself forward, raises the hoop a foot or two, falls back on the hoop, and lifts his feet a step or so. The whole procedure needs

care, or he will soon be slipping down the tree. I only know of two accidents in the districts in which I have lived—one man fell and was picked up dead; and the other dislocated his shoulder, but I was able to set it again in a few minutes.

The beer (*mbamvu*) is made from maize and manioc. The maize is malted by placing it on the ground, sprinkling it with water, and covering the heap with leaves until it sprouts. When the grain has thrown out rootlets about an inch long, it is dried by exposure to the strong sun for two or three days; in this way it becomes sweet and properly-malted grain. The manioc is peeled and dried in the sun, and then the sun-dried manioc and the malted maize are pounded together in a mortar until thoroughly crushed. It is then mixed with a proper proportion of water, and the mash thus made is boiled for twelve hours, strained, and left to cool. It is sweet and not intoxicating, and this drink is called *mulu*; but after three or four days it ferments, is intoxicating, sour, somewhat acid to the taste, and becomes the beer (*mbamvu*) so largely sold on the markets.

Mats (*tuandu*) of papyrus are made by peeling off strips of papyri, drying them in the sun, and threading them carefully on native-made twine; other mats (*mateva*) are woven from strips of palm frondlets, or the bark of a special kind of tree, and some of these mats have patterns of animals, and of various figures and designs in black, worked in them by dyeing some of the strips with a native dye. Water-bottles and pots of different sizes and shapes are made by the women, while the blacksmiths make hoes, axes, knives, &c. Shoulder bags and caps are knitted with twine; and I have seen them clean, spin, and wind cotton, and afterwards weave cloth and hammocks. The ordinary cloth of former times all over the country was a native woven cloth called *mbadi*. The threads were gathered from the leaves of new palm fronds. These leaves were stripped from the mid-rib and laid one by one flat on a smooth surface; the bottom end was held firmly by the finger and thumb of the left hand, with the right hand a knife was put on the leaflet, as near the holding-place as

possible, and then the leaflet was drawn steadily between the edge of the knife and the board. The skin was thus taken off the leaf, which was turned, and the operation repeated. In this way the thready fibres (*mpusu*) were left, and after being dried they were sold on the markets to the weavers of *mbadi*. On the introduction of pineapples a thread was manufactured from their leaves, and this thread is called *mafuba*, and the cloth woven with it *mbadi za mafuba*. The *mbadi* were woven on frames in pieces from twelve to fourteen inches wide and from fifteen to eighteen inches long, being limited only by the shortness of the threads, as they had no means of joining them together. Twenty-four of these small cloths sewn together made one full-sized cloth (*nkuta*) for a man of importance, less for an ordinary man, only one or two for a lad. The texture is so fine that a full-sized cloth will go into the space of a pint measure. These cloths are still made and worn in various parts, for as late as 1909 I was able to buy six of them, and could have had more; but European trade goods are gradually ousting the native manufactures, and the time is not far distant when they will be unprocurable.

The blacksmith holds an honourable position among the natives; his forge is regarded as somewhat of a sacred place, his fire must be treated properly, and his anvil is the object of respect. There is thought to be something of magic in the skill with which the blacksmith works the iron, hence his position in village life. In the long ago he made the spears, the long knives, and arrow-heads for use in their warfare; but the introduction of the gun, with its mysterious gunpowder and unseen bullets, has ousted the old fighting weapons, so that for more than a generation or two they have neither been made nor used throughout the Lower Congo. It is unfortunate that the introduction into the country of trade knives, hoes, guns, &c., has practically killed smithing as one of the skilled arts of the people, and the native blacksmith to-day is gradually passing away into what will soon be the forgotten past.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE FAMILY AND VILLAGE

IN San Salvador and the large towns in the neighbourhood, especially in those belonging to chiefs of importance, there is some pretence to regular streets or lanes running between the compounds (*lumbu*, plur. *tumbu*) of the headmen residing in them; but in the smaller towns and villages, where no fences are erected around the chiefs' houses, and consequently neither around the sets of houses belonging to their headmen, there is no attempt at regularity of building, but the houses are put here or there to suit the whim and convenience of their owners. The slaves and wives of the owner of a compound keep not only the ground inside the fences weeded and swept, but also the lanes running round it; and those whose houses are not enclosed in grass walls, but are abutting the roads, keep the spaces in front of their houses free from grass and rubbish, generally sweeping them every morning, so that the towns and villages usually possess a very neat appearance. There is no other law for this than public opinion, and the man whose part (*belo*) of the town (*evata*) is untidy and neglected becomes the butt of his neighbours' jeers and gibes. The grass immediately at the back of his house may be high enough to cast its shadow on the roof, but the front and sides must be clean, weeded, and swept.

The houses are of various sizes, from six feet wide by ten feet long, to an imitation of a white man's house in length, breadth, height, and design. They are built mostly of grass tied securely on poles and mid-ribs of palm-fronds; some are made of wattle and daub, colour-washed; many are of planks; and some may be seen of kiln-burnt bricks. It is not always the richest man who has the best house: but the most enter-

prising and energetic young men are building more permanent houses than their fathers, for much has been done in teaching carpentry, brick-making, brick-laying, &c. The houses, whether large or small, are very scantily furnished, and this is no great loss, for the natives delight in the open air, and use their houses mostly for storing their trade goods, for sheltering from the rains, and for sleeping.

The law of mother-right is disastrous to the home and family life: for in a man's household there are as many family interests as there are wives, as each wife, and any children she may have, is an important part of a family that has its centre outside her husband's compound; and the families thus represented may be on friendly terms, or feuds may arise between them that turn the compound into an arena of snarling women, quarrelling among themselves, and abusing each other with tongues well trained in the art of vituperation. In these rows the petty meannesses, and the delinquencies of each family are well canvassed, the past history of the members of the various families are detailed with scornful and contemptuous comments, and woe betide the woman in whose family a recent charge of witchcraft has been proved by the ordeal, or one for whom a small amount of marriage money was paid—she will wish that she had never been born, and she has been known to commit suicide in the poignancy of her shame. The husband, for his own amusement, will sometimes start the blaze by making a disparaging remark about the family of an unloved wife to his favourite for the time being, and she will quickly repeat it, and the sparks catching the dry tinder, the fire will spread rapidly to others, while the man sits by chuckling and enjoying the personal abuse that his women-folk, without selection of words or phrases, are hurling at each other. Such is the household of a polygamist where mother-right is in vogue; but where there is polygamy with father-right the state of things is somewhat better; still women are women all the country over, and several women tied to one man do not make for the harmonious working of family life. However, where father-right exists the husband is the centre of the family, the children belong to him, and the families of his



wives are not so much in evidence because they have no claim on the children, and therefore no reason to be considered in the household of the man who passes his position and property on to his own sons and daughters. I have lived for years, in each case, in close proximity to towns where these different customs—mother-right and father-right—were in full force, and I know that the women in the households of the former were more quarrelsome among themselves than those of the latter: for the latter household, centring as it did in the husband, there was more unity of family life, and greater community of interest.

The difference between *ekanda* (clan), and *vumu* (family, literally stomach, womb), is that *ekanda* is the name for all the families of a clan. The tree is the *ekanda*, and the branches are the *vumu*. The clan does not originate with the man, but has its origin only in the woman; and it is the same with all the divisions of the clan into families—each division or sub-division starts from a woman. The clans and families intermix freely, but the members of a clan are responsible for, and help each other. The names of some of the clans are as follows:—*KILUKENE*, *KIVAXI*, *ANKANGA*, *KINTUMBA*, *NENLAZA*, *KINLAZA*. On account of blood relationship a *Kinlaza* man must not marry a *Kinlaza* woman—it would be regarded as incest, and if unknowingly it took place the marriage would be destroyed; but as a guarantee for the proper treatment of their women it is customary, as already stated, for the women of one clan to marry the men of one other clan only.

Some generations ago a woman, apparently of importance, gave birth to three daughters—*NKENGE*, *NTUMBA*, and *LUKENE*. Each of these daughters became the head of a clan; and all the grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of *NKENGE* are called *esi Kinkenge*=those belonging to, or offsprings of, *NKENGE*; and thus with *esi Kintumba*, and *esi Kilukene*. After several generations other names are added to the clan-name in order to define the pedigree more clearly. Thus they say of one clan that they are *esi Kintumba-Mvemba*, showing that they have come from *NTUMBA* through *MVEMBA*; and in the same way with *esi Kinkenge-Nkumba* and *esi Kilukene-Miala*, the descend-





*Photo by*

*Rev. T. Lewis*

### PALM-TREE CLIMBER

In the stout cane hoop is a strong slip-knot, which is easily undone, and quickly and securely re-fastened as the palm-tapster goes from tree to tree. When ascending a tree he throws himself forward, raises the hoop, takes a step or two, and repeats the operation. He taps the tree for palm-wine, and also cuts down the bunches of palm-nuts.



ants of *NRENGE* through *NKUMBA*, and the descendants of *LUKENE* through *MIALA*. In some instances three names are joined together, but it is most probable that after a time the first name is dropped, and the two last, and even only the last, retained and given as the name of a clan. Any subdivision of the above clans is called *vumu* (family); and every woman with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren is considered to be the originator of a *vumu*, as all her descendants are looked upon as coming from her womb. The children born of family slaves are frequently called grandchildren (*ntekolo*); and when one of these "grandchildren" is given as a wife in exchange for a female member of the family, a present is given with her to "wash her blood" (*nsukula menga*), and thus remove the slave element, that she may be treated as a proper wife, and not as a slave. Her children will belong to the family of her owners, but will be called *ana akwa Kinkenge*=children born of a freed woman of the Kinkenge clan, and not *esi Kinkenge*=clansmen.

The names of towns often indicate the origin and position of their inhabitants, *e.g.* all branches of the *NSAKU-MIALA* call their towns Vunda; but this must not be pushed too far, as some of the meanings have now lost their significance, *e.g.* Kinganga towns were those whose inhabitants were believers in the priests (who called themselves *nganga*), and those who lived in the towns named Kolo were slaves of the priests. The meanings of both these names refer to the sixteenth century, when the Roman Catholic priests were all-powerful, and not to the present time, although the names continue to this day, pointing to the present dwellers in those towns as the probable descendants of the former believers, and slaves, of the priests.

Palm trees and *nsafu* trees (*canuarensis*) belong to the planter and to his heirs for ever, and they thus become inheritable property like wives and wealth. The palms and *nsafu* on an old town site belong to those who abandoned the site; but this right at times falls into abeyance, and anyone is allowed to gather the fruit; if, however, a famine should come the real owners can forbid any person taking the fruit belonging to those trees, and they will enforce their rights by invoking

a curse, by means of a fetish, on those who steal from their trees. Brothers can disown and disinherit one another, and this largely accounts for the divisions (*belo*) in a town, and also for the number of small villages dotted about the country. The severance is absolute, and no help is rendered by one to the other in any quarrels, fights, and palavers that may arise. An uncle can also disown his nephew and thus keep him from inheriting his wealth and position.

Sometimes a man is very hard pressed for money, or desires to raise some with which to start trading, hoping to be successful enough to repay in the near future. Such a borrower gives his creditor a nephew, or a brother, or a sister to hold as a pledge (*nximbi*). He is not permitted to give his own child, as he (or she) belongs to his mother's family, and he has no control over him. When the borrower has collected enough to redeem the pawn, he takes the money, a calabash of palm wine, and a *white* fowl, or a *white* goat to his creditor. The money is paid, the wine is drunk, and the white fowl, or goat, is presented to the creditor. This white gift is called "a being rubbed white" (*nkuswa mpemba*), for the man who holds the pledge rubs some chalk with his fingers by the side of the right ear of the pawn, and his redemption is completed, the chalk being a sign that he is *clean*, and there is nothing against him. If however, the borrower cannot collect sufficient money to redeem his pledge, he will take a calabash of palm wine and a goat to the lender and ask for the remainder of the price of the pawn he holds. Upon that being paid the goat is killed; one half is divided among the witnesses to the transaction, and the other half is given to the creditor, and the pawn is no longer a free person but a slave belonging to the family of the purchaser. A pawn does not receive any pay from the person who holds him in pledge; but he can work independently of his master, and can pay from his earnings the amount for which he was pledged, plus fifty per cent.; and the master on receiving the total and interest must give a *white* goat to his former pledge "to rub on the chalk," as a token that he is free.

Among the Upper Congo tribes it is possible to gauge

approximately the proportion of slaves in a town by the tribal mark seen on the faces of the men and women, boys and girls—those having other marks than the tribal mark of the district are slaves; but on the Lower Congo, where no tribal marks are used, it is more difficult to apportion the number of slaves to the population. As stated elsewhere, it is possible for a slave to redeem himself; but it is very rarely done, for a slave has seldom the ambition or the desire to be free, or the care and forethought to save his money for such a purpose.

A clan will combine against another clan to protect its members against being raided and carried off as slaves; and in less important affairs the members of a family (*vumu*) will join together to help one of their number in any trouble, such as paying a debt or a fine. The goods of the whole family are to a certain extent held in common—this is the theory, but the person needing help must be a *persōna grāta* to the family before those possessing the means will *have* the money to give or lend.

With regard to totemism, after very careful inquiries I have come to the conclusion that while at one time it may have been in force in this region, the only indication of such prevalence still surviving is to be found in certain clan names of which up to the present I have been able to procure the following: *ESI KIA NTU MIA NZENZE*=the people belonging to the heads of the mole-cricket. These are proud of their name because the mole-cricket (*nzenze*) always sticks up its head even when being cooked: but these same people hunt, cook, and eat the mole-cricket. *ESI KIMFULU*=the tortoise people; and they catch and eat tortoise in common with others. *ESI KINANGA*—the cowrie-shell people, who live in a town near Kitovola not far from Tumba railway station. It is quite possible that these names have nothing to do with a survival of totemism, but are simply clan names, and may even be sobriquets. There is nothing to hold the family and clan together but the recognition of a common origin from some female progenitor.

A town comprises many families, and these are not necessarily of one clan, but may be representatives of several



clans who for various reasons find it convenient to live in that particular town. Palavers that are strictly family affairs are settled by the families concerned; and those that affect the well-being or otherwise of the whole town are dealt with by the heads of the families with the chief at the head of their council. In times of war all the families join together, under the chief, to repulse the common enemy; and the chief on these occasions serves out the gunpowder and arranges the mode of fighting, either of attack or defence, and leads his men in the fight. He alone can sue for peace, and either accept or refuse the terms offered; or, being victor, he can receive the "white goat" of peace offering from the conquered, and make blood brotherhood with the enemy.

The Congo chief, especially as I knew him in the old days, was a quiet, dignified man, who knew his position, estimated himself highly, and received with proper pride the homage due to him from those who were of lower rank and birth. The homage he demanded from others, he willingly paid to the King, and to those nobles who were above him in rank. There was here and there a young, impetuous, reckless chief who for a time defied the conventions of his office, but he was soon brought to book, and was ultimately glad to submit to those rules that regulate the relationship between a chief and his people. With Belgium ruling over one part of the Lower Congo, and Portugal governing the other part, the position of a chief has been modified; some of the older families have been supplanted, and others have been put in their places who are more amenable to the new state of affairs, or have ingratiated themselves with the white masters. I have known many chiefs, and regard with respect and kindly feeling not a few.

The chiefs proper are the descendants of noble families; and each one is head of the people living in his town. He owns the ground upon which the town is built, the neighbouring plateaus, the farm lands, the woods, and the streams. During the time that the various families live in his town, they may hunt in the bush and forest, and cultivate the farm lands belonging to their chief, but on leaving the town to live elsewhere they have no further rights and privileges in those lands.



He allots to the women the ground necessary for their farms, shows them new farm sites when the old are exhausted (manuring has never been practised), and receives from each woman, in times of good harvest, a small portion of the peanut harvest of her farm. This tax is paid when there is a superabundance, but is neither recognised nor demanded in times of scarcity. A share of the palm wine gathered from the palm trees on his land is regularly given to him for the use of his household. He has a right to a portion of every animal slain within the limits of his territory, whether killed by his own people or by the folk of a neighbouring town—its death on his estate establishes for him a right to certain recognised portions. He receives a full share of all tolls paid for any bridges built by his people over neighbouring rivers, and a proportion of the fees paid by travellers—white and black—for being ferried in canoes by his people over rivers too wide to be spanned by such bridges as the natives can build. When a market is established on his ground he receives nothing for it; but if a roadside market is opened on a main or caravan route that happens to run across his land, he receives a small toll in recognition of his rights. He also receives all fines inflicted for breaking any of the laws of his town, and a share of those fines that are levied upon those who break the laws of the district in which he lives.

The Congo chief is the magistrate for his town or village. All quarrels between two or more of his people are submitted to him for arbitration; and he either “teaches” the disputants, or inflicts a fine as the case demands. In complicated disputes his principal men advise him; and when the trouble is between one of his own people and a person belonging to another town, then the two chiefs with their headmen judge the case. In quarrels involving whole villages, the overlord of the district sits as chief judge, while minor chiefs act as a kind of jury, or advisory council. Whilst undoubtedly there is a great deal of bribery, and false swearing, yet there are unwritten rules for regulating lawsuits. Moreover, the fines imposed are not arbitrary, the result of passion, or the whim of the moment, for when a law is promulgated the fine for breaking it is stated at the same time.

If the chief is a great one, an overlord, having wide influence, he levies an *ad valorem* toll on all trading caravans passing through his district, and for this he guarantees protection. He must be moderate in his demands, or the native traders will make a wide detour to avoid his territory; but his demands on the white traveller are often anything but moderate and reasonable.

On the chief's death a brother, by the same mother, takes his position as chief, and failing a brother, then his nephew. Whilst the chieftainship goes to a brother, the property is inherited by the nephew—the eldest son of the eldest sister—and failing a nephew, then the brother or sister, by the same mother, succeeds to the estate of the deceased. Should there be none, the wealth is distributed equally among the members of his family. Neither a child nor a wife inherits anything. If the wife has lent the husband any money, as is often the case, that is refunded to her; or if she has put some money into a trading scheme of her husband's, that capital is paid back to her—she has in these loans a first claim on the estate. The property of the maternal aunt goes to her husband at her death; and it is possible for the maternal uncle to will that his property should be divided among his brothers and sisters, by a declaration to this effect before witnesses; but if he has a pet nephew he wills all to him, and then on his decease the nephew winds up the corpse in the dead uncle's personal estate of cloth, buries the body, and places his uncle's crockery on his grave; then he takes over the real estate of his late uncle's slaves and wealth, and assumes the position of chief. When there is neither brother nor nephew to take the position of chief, then a sister, by the same mother, or a niece can become chief of the town with all its burdens and emoluments. I have known more than one woman who was a chieftess in their own rights; but I have only met one acting as a chief, and I have cause to remember her, for when I visited her town, tired and hungry, she kept me waiting more than two hours while she dressed in her finest cloth, beads, and paint to receive me in proper style, and show me a house in which to rest and sleep during my sojourn in her town.

## CHAPTER X

### CONGO WOMEN AND THEIR WAYS

AT any time between six and eight o'clock in the morning you can hear the rattle of brass anklets as the women and girls pass your bungalow to their farms. Poised on their heads are baskets, each containing, maybe, an empty calabash, or a hoe; a few of the women have pipes in their mouths, and here and there a mother is carrying her baby tied on her back by an old cloth, or leading a toddling child by the hand. For the most part the women are silent, and the earlier the hour the less garrulous are they who compose the procession of farm workers. Similar streamlets are flowing from the town on all sides, for the farms lie in the valleys and on the sloping hill-sides in all directions round the town.

Should you visit the farms during the morning or early afternoon you will see the women busily engaged in weeding the mounds of manioc, maize, and pumpkins, or hoeing and planting the manioc stems, or splitting the pumpkins and drying their seeds in the sun, or grubbing up the ground-nuts and spreading them to dry, according to the season of the year. Each woman works on her own farm; but here and there, where two or three women have united their forces and are working together, you can hear that their tongues are as busy as their fingers. Their amours, of the present and the past, are more than hinted at, and to hear their boastful talk you would judge them to be the objects of numerous intrigues; but their statements respecting such matters must be taken *cum grano salis*: or it may be that the latest witchcraft scandal is the subject, being canvassed with much freedom of expression, and with many phrases of surprise and invective; or some woman is cursing with bitter tongue the thief who has robbed her farm, and she is neither choice in

her language, nor reticent in her accusations; and in a neighbouring farm a shrill voice can be heard denying the innuendoes, and replying to the insinuations in vehement terms and loud curses. Most mothers work with their babies tied on their backs, for there are too many rumours, true and false, of children being carried off by wild animals or killed by snakes, &c., to leave them under the shade of the tree, unless it happens to be quite close to the plot of land being worked.

If you are walking out to the farms in the late afternoons, pushing your way through the tall grass that encircles the towns and villages, you will meet the women returning from the farms with baskets of food upon their heads, bundles of firewood in their arms, and calabashes of water tied on their backs, or, if they have babies on their backs, the water is balanced among the food in their baskets. They are laughing and chatting, for their tongues have been loosened by much exercise through the day; and as they catch sight of your well-known white face, they facetiously greet you with "Have you slept well, uncle?" or "father?" or "grandfather?" according to their age, or what they suppose yours to be. They are quite willing to crack a joke with you, and if you know their proverbs, or the niceties of their language, you will find them smart at repartee. They stand aside in the grass to let you pass along the narrow path, and each will give a greeting, or make an inquiry after your health, or throw out a laughing comment on your clothes or personal appearance as you go by; but if you are a stranger their tongues are tied, and your passage will be a silent one. They will stand aside out of respect for your white face, and as you pass they turn their faces away, and look at you furtively out of the corners of their eyes. To the friendly white man whom they know their greetings are kindly and pleasant; but to the unfriendly white man they have nothing to say, and their averted faces are a "cut-dead" about which there is no mistake.

The return of the women seems to rouse the town to life. The old, the young, and the sick, that have been drowsing in

the shade through the hot hours of the afternoon, come out of their cool hiding-places to greet the women, and scan with hungry, inquisitive eyes the contents of the baskets that are now on the ground; and the men and boys, having returned from their work in the forests, or from hunting, or from the markets, add their voices and laughter to the noises of the reawakened town. Above the hum of talk can be heard the shouts of wrangling women, and two or three loud, shrill-voiced women abusing each other are quite sufficient to dominate all other sounds. If you walk across the town about sunset you will notice the men and elder lads busy finishing some mats, or building a house, or sitting about waiting for the evening meal, while the women and girls, for the most part, are engaged in various cooking operations, but occasionally you will see some old women shelling peanuts or cracking pumpkin seeds, and retailing the gossip culled from the market, farm, or village that they have visited during the day.

Women loom large in Congo village and town life, and their position has both its advantages and disadvantages. There are women that stand out prominently as dominant factors in native life—women of a type that in other and civilised lands would be leaders of Society, centres of political intrigue, or the something around which would crystallise a special coterie, a cult, or a salon. They state their opinions freely and forcibly, they criticise unreservedly the actions of the men, and they express in no unmistakable terms their views of what should, or should not, be said and done in the “palavers” that are occupying the attention of the chief and headmen of the town—their words carry weight, and frequently turn the scale in favour of this or that course of action. Sometimes, being of noble family, they are present at the “palaver”; but more often they speak loudly as they sit at the open-air fire, and when they speak every other sound is hushed, and their voices carry far on a still night, and the chief and the headmen hear and profit by the advice thrown on the night air; and it is curious how many men at the next palaver hold similar views that jump with those that, a night



or so before, were flung by a strong-minded woman at the stars.

The free woman of ordinary intelligence, of average skill in farming and cooking, has in all things that pertain to women pretty much her own way; but the slave woman is the chattel of her owner, to be beaten without redress, to be abused without the power of replying, and to be passed from hand to hand without the opportunity of protesting against her fate. Any day she may be called upon, at the mere whim of a man, to give up her children, her village acquaintances, and her hard-worked farm, to start life afresh in a town both distant and strange.

The Congo woman reflects as readily her temporary circumstances as a river does the bright sunshine or the passing cloud. When in health, her farm yielding well, and her market transactions are profitable, her mouth is full of laughter; but the slightest ill-health, or the smallest reverse, and her spirits drop to zero, her face is drawn and smileless, and her temper uncertain. She will respond quickly to a kindness; but a supposed affront will arouse her bitterest resentment, and in her anger she will do and say things that will amaze the impartial onlooker, and astonish herself in calmer moments. She is swayed by various superstitions and omens, and is a great asset to the witch-doctor, and no small source of his wealth and prestige. She can be a bitter enemy and a faithful friend, and will fight tenaciously for the side upon which she arrays herself. She is very conservative in her outlook, and the *status quo* of her village and home life has no stauncher supporter; but once win her to other views and there is no more self-sacrificing adherent to be found anywhere, for she will give her time, her strength, and her money to promote that which she believes to be right, and neither sneers, nor ridicule, nor persecution will damp her ardour, or turn her from her purpose.

In the heathen village she is encouraged by her mother, and taught by the customs of the place, that before betrothal, and even after she is bespoken, intercourse with the lads and



bachelors is both legitimate and natural; but when as a married woman she becomes *enceinte* she will suppress herself, control her passions, and treat men as utterly non-existent for three years or more. This she does on the supposition that it will be beneficial for her child, but it exhibits a power of self-control for which she receives little credit from members of a higher civilisation, who often ignorantly regard her as being little, if any, better than a mere animal.

A barren woman on the Lower Congo is ridiculed by the women of her district, and is treated with scorn by her own family, for she has failed to add her quota to the maintenance of the clan. Her name is bandied from mouth to mouth in the village song, her life is rendered intolerable by the sneers of her neighbours, and suicide has not infrequently been the result of the treatment meted out to her. If, however, she can prove that her husband is to blame, she can procure a divorce from him, and he then becomes the butt of the village wits.

On the Lower Congo mother-right has been in vogue for untold generations, and this has fostered the idea that it is the sole duty of a woman to give birth to children that *her* family may not die out, but rather rise in importance with the increase of its members. It is to enlarge *her* family that she was *loaned* to the man; the children belong to her eldest brother, and it is her eldest son who will become heir to her brother's property, and to his position also if there is no brother's brother to take the place of the deceased. Wherever I have found mother-right in full force on the Congo, I have observed that the women keenly desire to bear children, and those customs are fostered and strengthened that maintain and meet this desire.

When a barren woman has tried charms and fetishes of various kinds and they have failed her, she goes to the medicine-man (*ngang' a nkau*) who is at the head of the secret society called the country-of-the-dead (*nxi-a-fwa*, see p. 158); and he, having procured certain leaves the names of which are kept a profound secret, squeezes their juice into palm wine, which she drinks. She remains in the "doctor's" town a considerable time. Or, if a lodge of this society is started in her district, she will

enter it and spend many months there, during which she is supposed to die, and in due time she is restored to life with all her functions in a normal condition, *i.e.* fit to bear children. Or she may arrange with her husband for a strong, healthy man to visit her, and should she bear a child, her husband will regard it as his own and will treat it as such; and the woman can claim a divorce if she wishes to leave the husband.

After the above remarks it may seem strange that there should be various methods of procuring abortion; yet there are times when a woman does not wish to be a mother, as when her hatred towards her husband more than counterbalances her longing for children: or, when she is desirous of shielding an illicit lover. It must be remembered that in a country where polygamy is recognised a large number of virile young women are often tied to an old man, hence when such wives stray from the paths of native virtue they will submit to such means as will hide their shame, protect the child from scorn, and save their lover from the payment of a heavy fine. They may go to a medicine-man, but this is not very probable, as such visits are soon noised abroad, and will in time reach the ears of the husband. They resort mostly to the juice of manioc leaves, or to a large dose of common salt, or to a small piece of *nsele-nsele* root, powdered and drunk with water or palm wine, or to eating manioc leaves that have been soaked in water for many days. The leaves are astringent, and the root causes severe diarrhœa.

When an unmarried woman has a child, no fine is paid by the man, but the child is never allowed to call him father, although they may both be living in the same town. The child belongs to the woman's family, is known to all as a "child of adultery" (*mwan' a zumba*), and is spoken of as such. The other children taunt him by saying, "You have no father, you came from a tree." In the Ngombe Lutete district the man has now to pay a fine for adultery.

At one time it was the custom for women and girls to live apart periodically in a special house (*nzo a nsanga*) so as to isolate them from all contact and converse with men.

When they stopped building these separation houses such women confined themselves to the more obscure part of the house (*ngudi a nzo*), and used their own door, in the back wall, for exit and entrance. During these times a woman is not permitted to cook her husband's food, nor food for any male member of her family; neither is she allowed to touch anything belonging to a man, nor return a man's salutation. If she has to pass near where some men are sitting who are likely to give her the equivalent of "Good morning," or "Good evening," she deliberately puts her pipe in her mouth, and gripping it firmly with her teeth she makes it stick out straight in front of her, as a sign that she may not answer, for she is regarded as unclean. In a large number of towns and villages the women are counted unclean every morning until they have bathed; and in these towns it is reckoned exceedingly bad taste for an unwashed woman to speak to a man—any man; and many a woman has been thrashed for laxity in the observance of this rule.

Some cases of incest are known, but it is very rare. When committed with a sister, or with a father's wife, the punishment is either death or banishment. One of each kind came to my knowledge, and they were both banished from the town: one has not been heard of for thirty years, and the other has not been allowed to return to San Salvador for nearly twenty years. Sometimes, but rarely, a man commits this crime with his mother-in-law, while his wife is alive, and may want to take her as his wife after his wife—her daughter—is dead. This is not permitted, and the man is liable to be tied and whipped very severely; and such a man would find it difficult to procure another wife in a district where he is known.

Women who are *enceinte* have many whims and fancies, which their husbands do their best to supply. Tadpoles are much sought after and enjoyed by women in this condition, and they are also very fond of the red earth of ants' nests.

If a man is very hospitable and entertains many friends, his wife will perhaps be afraid that her husband will not eat sufficient food to satisfy himself, and if she is a good wife,

caring for her husband, she reserves and hides an extra portion for him to be eaten after his visitors have gone. Such a woman is regarded as a paragon of thoughtfulness, as is also the other kind of woman who, when her husband is in difficulties with a creditor, will not allow herself to be induced to leave him for the creditor in payment of the debt owing, although her family gives its consent for her to do so, and even tries to persuade her. Such an opportunity is taken advantage of by too many women, for such marriages (*longo luampela*) are somewhat common.

## CHAPTER XI

### BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

THE Congo baby on the first day of its birth is nearly white, with a slight greyish tint in its skin, but every day it becomes darker, until in a few weeks it assumes the rich brown coffee colour of its parents. The Congo baby is surrounded with various charms, and is the object of many superstitious rites. In anticipation of its arrival a female "doctor" (called *ngang a nkamba*) is sent for, who procures pieces of different kinds of fish and animals which she cooks together. Then she threads a necklace of beads with a univalve shell in the centre, and into this shell she puts a little chalk, a certain leaf, a pinch of salt, and a portion of the prepared stew. The prospective mother must pass her tongue every morning across the opening of the shell, to ensure an easy delivery of a healthy child used to all kinds of food. The expectant mother having received her charm, the "doctor" feeds her with some of the stewed fish and meats; and then a curious custom follows, of the reason for which no one can inform me. A fowl is cooked and a leg of it is put on one side for the eldest child of the prospective mother (or, failing a child, for her sister or next nearest relation). The child must pretend to steal it, and as he runs away those members of the families who are present make a feint of catching him, and shout after him "Thief! Thief!" After the birth of a child the husband must not, and will not, go near the house for three weeks or a month.

The new-born babe is washed with warm water; and a woman, other than the mother, nurses the child for one day. When, however, the mother goes to the farm leaving her baby in the town, it is nursed in a friendly way by any woman who



has a child of similar age. It is thought that if the child belonging to the friendly nurse is older, her milk will be too strong for the younger baby, and will cause it to vomit. As soon as the child is old enough it eats roasted cassava, or peanuts, which have been masticated first by the mother, and the child is not weaned until he is about three years old: a bitter decoction is then put on the breast to disgust the child.

By the side of the fire in the house of a new-born child there is always a pot<sup>1</sup> of hot water, and the man, old or young, who drops the first bead into it any time during the first two days can claim the baby, if a girl, as his future wife. The bead must be dropped in within two days after the birth, and may be dropped in by a parent on behalf of a son. Only a member of those clans into which the girl may marry will attempt to establish a claim in this manner. Although the marriage money will not be paid until later, yet no one else will be allowed to marry her. A man of the wrong clan, or a stranger (though it is unlikely that a stranger will be able to enter the house) who puts the bead into the saucepan will have it returned to him; but if there is neither kinship nor clan reason, nor any other real objection why the person dropping in the bead should not eventually marry the girl, he will bitterly resent the return of the bead as a gross insult. The saucepan, however, is well guarded during these two days, and only a very small percentage of the girls are bespoken in this manner. A bead given in this way is regarded as a gift to the girl, and enables the giver to set up an exclusive claim to her hand when she arrives at a marriageable age; but when that time comes the man will have to pay the marriage money usually demanded for a girl of her position. Or, if that amount is placed at an absurdly high figure, and is consequently prohibitive, the man can claim the return of his "gift," and he can legally demand such a high rate of interest that a lawsuit may be necessary to settle the affair.

The house in which a birth takes place is for the time being called *kialakaji*, a name that indicates that it is a

<sup>1</sup> This special pot is called *nsansilwa*.





*Lent by*

### LOWER CONGO WOMAN AND CHILD

*Rev. J. L. Forfeitt*

This is a typical Lower Congo woman. The upper front teeth are removed, which was a more common custom thirty years ago than now. The fringed cloth was, at one time, the only article a woman wore, and it was tied round the waist exposing the right thigh. The cloth was sewn by the men, and it was the duty of a good husband to give occasionally a new cloth to each of his wives.



place where a child is being suckled. Immediately on the birth of the baby a new middle frond of a palm is cut, shaken out, and placed over the door to protect the infant from two kinds of dangers. Should a quarrel arise in the town, or an enemy attack the town, no one would dare to molest a house thus guarded by a palm frond; and it warns off those people who eat the animal which is taboo to the new baby's family, for such must not enter the house: for example, if the taboo (in this instance called *mpangru*) of the child's family is hippopotamus meat, then any one who eats that animal must refrain from entering the house, or the child will become sickly, and perhaps die. In about a month the palm frond is removed, as the baby, by that time, is regarded as strong enough to be unaffected by such malign influences. Women sometimes suffocate their children, but unless this is done before the child cries, it is treated as murder and punished accordingly.

If a woman, while *enceinte*, dreams of running water, snakes, or water-sprites (*ximbi*), she believes that her child will be an incarnation of a water-sprite. The sprites inhabit the streams, and the snakes live among the stones near the water-courses, hence to dream of snakes or running water is equivalent to dreaming of the water-sprites themselves. Therefore, directly such a child is born, a cloth is tied round it and no one is permitted to know its sex, except the "doctor," until it receives its name. A few days after the birth of the child a particular kind of "doctor"<sup>1</sup> is called, who starts a dance which lasts all night, and is accompanied with much drinking and drumming, and the firing of many guns if the family is sufficiently wealthy. A bower of palm fronds is erected as a shelter for the father, mother, and baby; and all the plates, dishes, and pots used during the accouchement are placed near the booth. At dawn the "doctor" takes a plate of palm wine, and, dipping some leaves in it, he sprinkles the baby, the

<sup>1</sup> Named *ngang' a nkisi*. (*Nkisi*=fetish, charm, amulet.) This "doctor" is always called upon to perform his ceremony when there is anything unusual or abnormal about the birth of a child.

mother, and the father, after which he asks the crowd three times if they know the child's name. They answer, "No, we do not know the name." Thereupon, the "doctor" shouts out, "It is Lombo." At once the people make a noise by clapping the palms of their hands on their open mouths.

The folk, on hearing the name Lombo, know that the child is a girl, for if it were a boy its name would be Etoko; and they also know from the name given that the mother has dreamed either of running water, or snakes, or water-sprites. The "doctor" receives a fee of one fowl, fifteen strings of beads, and all the utensils that were placed near the booth at the commencement of the ceremonial dance. All the girls called Lombo and the boys named Etoko are supposed to be incarnations of water-sprites, or possess in some strange way the *orenda*, or nature, of the snake.

When the child grows up, it receives presents from its relatives and neighbours on account of its sprite nature. The sprites are supposed to endow one thus born with various powers and fairy gifts, and hence the presents are given to Lombo and Etoko children to gain the good-will of these incarnations or favourites of the sprites. It is believed that they have the power, not only of imparting good luck, but also of inflicting many misfortunes; and the presents are given to obtain the former and avert the latter from the givers; and the whole of the "christening" ceremony is to make the sprite-child amenable to the ordinary rules of life. The *lemba-lemba* leaves used in the ceremony are only employed by a "doctor" when something uncanny is to be counteracted in the person subjected to the rite, as in the case of a madman, a homicide, &c. These children become quickly aware of the deference paid to them by their families and neighbours, and they develop into arrogant little pests, as they find that their demands are not refused.

Snakes are either under the special protection of the water-sprites, or are incarnations of them, and, on account of this connection, snakes are not killed or hurt in a house where these sprite-children have been born; and neither Lombo nor

Etoko children are allowed to kill snakes, lest they should murder one of their own kith and kin. They do not drive them from their houses, and the snakes, apparently conscious of their immunity, are very frequently found in the houses of men and women called Etoko and Lombo. Again, the most vulnerable part of a snake is its head, and people must not strike these sprite-children on the head. There is an indefinable but clear connection in the native mind between the water-sprite, the snake, and the Lombo and Etoko children.

It is believed that the only new thing about an infant is its body. The spirit or soul of the child is thought to be old, and to have belonged either to a deceased person, or to a living person, or, as stated above, to a water-sprite. For this belief they give two reasons. They notice that the child speaks at an early age of strange matters the mother has never taught it, and this they regard as the old soul talking in the new body; and again, if the child is like a relative it is thought to have the soul of the person it resembles, and that person being now soulless will soon die. Hence in Congo, to say that a baby is like anyone, is not regarded as a compliment, and is anything but pleasing to that person, for you have observed what they have been trying to hide from themselves—the likeness, which proves that the child has their souls, and that they themselves will soon die. Neither may you say that the baby is “fat” (*maji*), for they think you want “to eat it” in spirit, and as a result the baby will quickly die; nor may you praise it as a fine child, for the evil spirit (*ndoki*) will hear you, and take it away, *i.e.* it will die; and for the same reason parents never count their children lest the evil spirit should hear them and remove one or more by death. You may speak of it as a “stout” (*mpongo*) child without giving any offence.

A baby that presents its feet first at birth is always called Nsundi, no matter what its sex may be; but a few years later, the above ceremony as for a sprite-child takes place, and a more suitable name is chosen by the boy or girl. A child born with six fingers is called Ngonga; and should a



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woman bear a child a considerable time after the way with women has ceased, that child is known as Mavakala all through life. A child born with teeth is named Mavasavasa, and such an abnormal event is placed to the credit of a fetish power. The first child of twins is always called Nsimba, and the second Nzuji; and the first baby born by a mother after twins takes the name of Nlandu, and the second after twins that of Lukombo. An albino always takes the name of Ndundu, and is believed to be the incarnation of a water-sprite, and as such is supposed to possess much power. He is not worshipped but is greatly feared by the people, for he not only causes humpback and rheumatism, but he can also cure these and various other complaints and deformities. When he dies his spirit does not go to the forest like the spirits of ordinary people, but returns to the water. A child born by the same mother after an albino, and having light eyes and skin, yet not a true albino, is named Lubela. Thus to hear these names is to know at once the birth-history of the person bearing them (see page 129 under the *Ekinu* dance for other names of a special character).

Because of the extra trouble they entail, the Lower Congo women do not take kindly to twins, hence it is the general practice to starve one of them. When a twin is thus starved, or dies a natural death, a piece of wood is roughly carved to represent a child, and it is put with the living twin that it may not feel lonely. Should the second child die the image is buried with it. The corpse of a twin is placed on leaves and covered with a white cloth, and is buried at the cross roads like a suicide, or a man killed by lightning. It is regarded as a hateful thing, and is buried in the most dishonourable of all graves.

A Congo mother is not long in washing and dressing her baby. She simply holds it over a saucepan of warm water, and throws the water over the kicking, screaming babe with her hand; she then shakes off the superfluous water and the bathing is finished. The dress consists of a string of beads



round the waist, and a few charms tied on various parts of the body. These charms are to protect it from those diseases to which Congo babies are subject. There are horns and shells into which the "doctor" has put strange messes; and there are beans, leaves, and twigs that are supposed to preserve the child from stomach-ache, convulsions, wind, and diarrhoea. Should the mother die the living child is buried with the corpse; and very often the babies suck for hours at the dead breasts, before the time of burial arrives. The reason for this is, that no woman wants the trouble of bringing up a child which will, by and by, be claimed by the child's own family; and she will also be held responsible by the child's family for anything that may happen to the baby while it is in her care. This is one of the by-products of mother-right. Their cruelty is more often the outcome of their superstitious fears, and of their clashing customs, than from a delight in causing pain and suffering.

Some anxious mothers, after the birth of a child, send for a witch-doctor (*ngang' a munkanda*=traps), who brings with him a number of small, conical basket traps—hence the name of his order. These he carefully places all round the doors of the house to catch any evil spirits (*ndoki*) that may try to get into the house, and enter the child to kill it. The "doctor" looks at the traps every morning, and if he finds a cockroach or spider in any one of them, it is looked upon as a proof that he has caught an evil spirit in the very act of entering the house to harm the child. Evil spirits can disguise themselves in any convenient form, and the "doctor" before setting the traps puts in something to attract the insects. If before birth a "doctor" says that the child's hair is not to be cut until he comes, then they wait for him, and on his arrival he squeezes the juice of some leaves over the hair, and then cuts it.

When a girl is old enough, *i.e.* about six or seven years of age, she helps her mother in the house, in cooking, and in farm work. She fetches the water from the nearest stream, which means from ten to forty minutes' walk according to distance. Water

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kept in the house all night is thrown away in the morning, hence the fetching of a fresh supply is a daily necessity, and in the dry season it often means a very cold journey, in the early morning, to an almost naked girl. On her return she sweeps the house, which is an easy task where there are no carpets to shake and no furniture to dust and polish—a broom is run over the earthen floor and it is finished. As a rule the fire is kept burning all night, for the heat warms the sleepers, and the smoke drives away the mosquitoes; but should the fire go out it is the girl's duty to relight it. This is not so easy as it appears; for she must not take fire from another hearth lest she gives her family any disease from which the people are suffering from whom she procures the lighted stick to rekindle her own fire. The introduction of matches has simplified the process, but where such European luxuries have not yet penetrated the girl must use the flint and steel, or know for a certainty of a thoroughly healthy family from whose hearth she can take, without fear of evil consequences, a little fire to restart her own.

After her morning duties, the girl takes her hoe, basket, and calabash and accompanies her mother to the farm, where she hoes, plants, weeds, and reaps according to the season, under her mother's guidance; and in the evening she assists in cooking the evening meal, which is the principal one of the day. A thoughtless mother, who does not teach her daughter these various duties against the time she has a house and farm of her own, is condemned by all the village folk; and a girl who neither cooks nor farms properly will bring a very low price in the marriage market; and "going cheap" she is the butt of much ridicule, and the subject of taunts, jeers, and impromptu village songs.

The girl remains under the protection of her mother until her marriage; but should the mother die, she is sent to her maternal uncle, who becomes her sole guardian and the arbiter of her fate. The girl's mother, should she be alive, has much to say regarding the disposal of her daughter's hand; and the prospective bridegroom who does not conciliate her

with small presents and thus seek to win her consent to the marriage, may succeed in winning his bride, but he will have in his mother-in-law a veritable vixen who will undermine his domestic peace by constantly trying to set her daughter against her husband. I have known of more than one separation between husband and wife take place for no other reason than this.

The boy is taught by the father to set traps for farm rats, wild animals, and birds; and he also teaches him to buy and sell on the markets, to trade, to carry loads, to build, to sew his own clothes, and to be able to sew his wife's (or wives') clothes too. The girls are not taught to sew, for the rough, hard hoeing of their farms soon stiffens their fingers, and renders them unfit to hold a needle. The son, if properly trained, visits the different towns and districts in the neighbourhood of his home, and becomes more or less expert in the matters that he should know as a man.

When the lad is about fourteen or fifteen years old the boy's maternal uncle brings a calabash of palm wine to the father and claims the lad. The father has no power to withhold him from going with his uncle, but the lad himself can refuse to go, and thus elect to remain under the tutelage of his father as long as he likes. Until the uncle comes with the palm wine the lad is under the protection of his father, who is responsible for him to the boy's family, but on the boy going with the uncle, the father's responsibility is ended.

A father is not allowed to appropriate his children's goods, nor may he take possession of any wealth they have inherited from their mother, nor can he take his wife's money. If he is pressed for money he can borrow from his wife, if she is willing; and very often they each put a certain amount of capital into a trading venture, and share accordingly; and should the husband die first, the wife has priority of claim on his goods up to the amount lent, or the capital put into the trading concern. On the other hand, a woman can take the man's (her husband's) goods and need not repay the debt. Where mother-right exists the position of free women is in

some respects greatly in advance of those tribes where father-right is the rule.

A father may prosecute his child, but a child is not permitted to institute a lawsuit against his father; and for this reason there is a strong public feeling that a father should treat his children properly, as they have no redress.

There is something very pleasing and lovable about Congo children. When they have once conquered their fear of our white faces and strange clothes, they become very trustful, confidential, and ever ready with a smile that is often winsome. Before they knew us they were constantly threatened with "The white man is coming to take you away"; and many a child in Congoland has been frightened into obedience, or startled into quietness, by the horrible words, "Here is the white man," or "I will give you to the white man," and other phrases in which the white man looms as the bogey. Later on, in their teens, they become wilful, passionate, and difficult to manage, for the father exercises little or no control over them—they do not belong to him, and the mother is often weak and allows them to have their own way. As Christianity and civilisation bring better influences to bear on their home life, and effect more control over their hearts and lives, many of the repulsive lines now seen in the faces of the men and women—largely the result of wild, ungoverned passions—will be eliminated, and the pleasant faces of childhood and youth will be seen in later life, and even in old age.

## CHAPTER XII

### NATIVE AMUSEMENTS

THERE is not a great variety of games known to the natives. Hockey is played all over the Lower Congo, and in recent years it has penetrated to some parts of the Upper River. The lads are intensely fond of the game, and no matter how long their journey has been, or heavy their loads, they will, a few minutes after arriving at a resting-place, look around for a suitable piece of ground, and finding it, they will start a game of hockey. At Wathen station, where a fine open space has been utilised as a playground, hockey is played on every available opportunity, and a great amount of energy is expended on the game. The boys cut their own sticks in the forest, and make their own rough wooden balls, and arrange sides as we do; but there is little science in the game, as they do not care to keep to their places, but like running all over the field. On arriving at San Salvador in the early part of 1882 I found the boys of that generation just as keen on hockey as the lads of the present day.

On moonlight nights they play a game called *mbele*. This is played by both sexes joining together, and to the beat of drums and singing. This game, however, led to so much adultery and its attendant "palavers," that when the Christian Church was formed, the native members desired that there should be rules to the effect: that no Church members should play mixed *mbele*, i.e. the males should play by themselves, and the women and girls by themselves in another part of the town; and that, as the drums badly excited them, causing them to lose all self-control, the game should be played without the beating of drums. The making of these rules has led to greater morality among those who observe them—



and they are very numerous ; and any Church member breaking them is disciplined by his fellow-members.

The boys and girls have their make-believe games, such as cooking, feasting, and marketing. It is pleasant to watch them on such occasions. How seriously they walk to their make-believe markets, and chaffer as they have seen their elders do, for the mock goods exposed for sale ! Then, outside some rudely erected toy hut, built by the boys, they cook their pretended food on fireless hearths in odd bits of broken saucepan rescued from the rubbish heap, and inviting their child friends, they sit down to eat their imaginary feast with much laughter, and probably with as much relish as the real ones. Perhaps they have raided their mothers' baskets and shelves, and thus their imaginations are aided by a few real nuts, a piece of sugar cane, and a lump of native bread.

Some of the boys have visited the State Station with their fathers or brothers, and have seen the soldiers drill ; and nothing will satisfy them but to drill the small fry of the village. There they are in a line marching along the village street with sticks for guns, an old kerosene tin for a drum, and three or four reeds for trumpets. How self-consciously they strut along, with what marvellous flourishes the instruments play ; but proudest of them all is he who drills them by shouting words that are neither French nor Congo, but are the nearest imitations he can produce to the sounds he heard on the white man's parade-ground. He does not know what they mean, neither does his regiment, but they turn this way and that way and are boisterously happy. Sometimes with a few empty provision tins they will start a band, and jokingly serenade you, but a little salt will please them, and they will take themselves and their so-called music to another place, feeling well repaid by your small present—for salt is as much appreciated by Congo boys and girls as chocolates are by English children. Congo, however, is a toyless country, a land where children are not catered for ; but notwithstanding that the youngsters by their boisterous laughter and merry shouts seem to extract a great amount of joy out of life.





*Photo by*

#### NATIVE DRUMMERS

*Rev. F. Oldrieve*

The drums are beaten with the palms of the hands, and one drummer has dried capsules tied on his wrists, into which small pieces of loosely folded tin have been inserted, so that the beat of the drums is accompanied by the rhythmic jingle of the rattles.



For the names and movements of some of the games that follow I am indebted to Dr. Bentley.<sup>1</sup> There is a game played by two children called, “The Young Pigeon” (*mwan' eyembe*). The left hands are held, and with the right hand each rubs his own ribs, whilst the supposed mother bird sings this little ditty:

“O mwana a eyembe	The young pigeon
Kameneno nsala ko ;	Has not yet grown feathers ;
E lumbu kemenwa e nsala	The day when the feathers are grown
Ku mputu kekwenenda	To the white man's country shall go
O eyembe papa e papa.”	The pigeon, flap, flap.

The “young pigeon” coos an accompaniment, and when the song is finished, the players clap their right hands over and under the interlocked left hands, which are then separated, and each claps his own hands together and strikes his right thigh, after which they lock hands and commence again.

There is another game called “Spider” (*esanga ngungu*), which is played by a number of children joining hands and dancing round a youngster (the spider) in the middle, who tries to seize one of the dancers by the leg and drag him down. The victim, as he is seized, cries out: “Alas! alas! I have stepped on a thorn under the water.”

*Chorus of all the other dancers.* Pull it out.

*Victim.* I would have pulled it out, but my knife is blunt.

*Chorus.* Try and go to sleep.

*Victim.* I have repeatedly tried to sleep but failed.

*Chorus.* Count your followers (*i.e.* think of those belonging to you).

*Victim.* I have tried again and again, but they are so numerous they cannot be counted.

*Chorus.* Try once more.

*Victim.* I have a relative, Bukusu, the Bukusu who wears

<sup>1</sup> Bentley's *Dictionary and Grammar of the Congo Language*, p. 492. Trübner & Co., 1887.

seven necklaces; had he brought with him a pumpkin leaf mixed with a cabbage leaf it would have soothed it.

The one caught proceeds to mention all the other dancers in the same way. (A knife is always used to extract a thorn from the sole of the feet, as the skin is very hard, and needs a sharp knife to cut the corneous skin round the thorn to get a grip of it.)

A game called *Nkenka* is played by the boys and girls digging a hole (*exulu*) about twenty inches deep by about four inches in diameter. This is half filled with peanuts (*nguba*), and then filled with earth well rammed in. The midrib (*mbasa*) of a palm frond is made into a fork (*nsoma*) with several prongs. The fork is driven through the dirt into the peanuts below, and if, on being pulled out, it has a peanut on it the fortunate driver wins all in the hole. Each player puts an equal portion of peanuts in the hole.

The children hide a small, hard, brightly-coloured seed in one of five little heaps of sand or dust. The one whose turn it is to play has to level down four of the heaps, leaving intact the heap containing the seed. Should he succeed he has the privilege of hiding the seed. A tally of successful guesses is kept by making a mark (*soneka e sinsu*) with the finger on the ground.

For lads there is a game of touch with the feet on all fours with the back undermost called *Nkiendi*. A large court is marked out on the ground, and the "hunters" (*nkongo*) chase the "antelope" (*nkayi*), who is not allowed to run outside the court. The "hunters" run about on all fours with their faces uppermost; and in this ridiculous manner they hurry around after the "antelope," who is the only one permitted to stand up. The hunters try to hem him in a corner; but if the "antelope" to avoid capture runs out of the court, then they all get up on their legs and follow after him, and the one who catches him first and pretends to cut up the "antelope" takes his place in the court. It causes a great amount of laughter and excitement, as every "hunter" makes a pretended cut at the "animal" with shouts

of "The head for me," "A leg for me," "Some flesh for me." They tumble on one another like a scrimmage in football. Sometimes a rule is made that there shall be no chasing beyond the court, and if the "antelope" breaks the bounds, the first "hunter" who sees him cries out, "The antelope has broken loose," and takes his place as "antelope."

A number of players sit on the ground in a circle with their legs stretching before them. One of the players puts a ball (*esomba*) on his knees, and with one leg jerks the ball, and rolls it on to the knees of his neighbour. Should the ball fall to the ground, the player who thus fails to pass on the ball must go into the centre of the ring and dance for the amusement of the others. This game is called *Dibulungu*.

When a fresh bean-pod is put out in the sun it will warp and turn over as it dries, and this has suggested the name for a game called *Titi kia lukasa*, or pod of a bean. The players form a ring, each grasping loosely with his right hand the left wrist of his neighbour. One of the players then lifts his right leg over his right arm as it holds the left arm of his neighbour, then he passes his left leg in the same way over his right arm. He now stands facing his two neighbours, his arms crossing at the back with the left arm uppermost; then by passing his left arm over his head, he turns round and assumes his former position in the circle. Each player does this in turn, and the clumsy become the butt of ridicule to the others.

The fruits of the croton plant (*Jatropha curcas*) lend themselves to a game named *Vit' a mbuta*. A number of lads divide themselves into two sides, each player having a good supply of croton fruit, which are about the size of a chestnut. The sides stand about forty yards apart, and in the middle each builds its own "town"—little piles of croton fruit, four in a pile and one "town" for each side. They then take up their position at their own respective ends, and each side, with its store of crotons, pelts the "town" belonging to the other side, and when one "town" is knocked down they

rush on the losing side and throw crotons at them, and then the *mêlée* becomes general, and crotons are flying in all directions. As accidents often occur in the last rush the game is forbidden in some towns.

A game somewhat similar to "Hunt the Slipper," but called by the natives *Nduku*, is played thus: the players form two sides and sit in lines feet to feet. A cloth is thrown over the legs, and a small article is passed from one to another under the cloth, every one rummaging about as though pretending to pass it. A player on the opposite side challenges one on the playing side by saying, "Confess" (*funguna*), and attention being given to him, the leader on the playing side asks, "On whose head?" (*ku ntu a nani*). And the person thus challenged guesses who has the article. If he is right the article is handed to his side, and it counts one game to his side.

There is "Blind Man's Buff" (*Njimina*), which is usually played in the house; another kind of "Hunt the Slipper" (*Nkandi a ngongo*), in which a palm-nut is passed round the ring of players, and the one in the centre pounces on the person who he thinks has it, and they change places if he is right. Then there is hopping the longest time (*Nsongongo*), and "Touch" (*Ejio*).

In a former work <sup>1</sup> the writer has given a full description of *Mbele*, a game which is very popular all over the Congo; also of a hoop game (*Lungungu*); and of searching for a needle, directed by the playing of a *Biti*; and the game of *Loso*, played with the canna seeds.

There is a bull-roarer (*Ngwingwingwe*) made from a bamboo or a piece of wood. It is regarded only as a plaything. Women, and also men and children, put their hands over their faces when a person approaches who is twirling one of them, but this appears to be only from fear of the many accidents due to bullroarers coming off their strings, and flying into the faces of those who happen to be near. String games, or cats'

<sup>1</sup> *Congo Life and Folklore*. John H. Weeks. Religious Tract Society, 1911.



cradles are to be found, but they are not very common. "Odds and Evens" (called *Mpinji*, and also *Nxibidi*) is sometimes played—the odds are named one (*kimosi*), and the evens, two (*yole*).

There is a gambling game (*Wadi*) played by adults and young men, with eight discs (*mpanza*), either of calabash or crockery, having one side white and the other coloured. They are rattled in the hands and then thrown (the thrower is *nte*, the throw is *t' e mpanza*, for the discs to fall white side up is *sengoka*, and coloured side up *bukama*). When the pieces are thrown, if even numbers turn white side up, 2, 4, 6 or 8, the player loses, and such a throw is called *zole*, and when 8 whites turn up it is named *kaya*. When odd numbers or no white sides show, 0, 1, 3, 5, 7, the player wins. The winning throws have certain names. No whites is called *mayembe* (pigeons); 1 coloured is *manga*=snake's sting, 3 or 5 coloured is *ngo*=leopard, 7 coloured same as 1, *manga*. It is at this game the natives often lay heavy stakes, and sometimes slaves.

There is another game called *Kulukuta*, which is played in the same way as *Wadi*, but instead of money being staked, the loser has to eat an arranged number of chilli peppers, sometimes as many as ten. Occasionally the players will stipulate that the pepper shall be rubbed in the eyes of the loser, a cruel arrangement, causing excruciating pain to the unfortunate loser. When a player has lost ten times in succession he is excused all further penalties.

Every kind of event gives an occasion for a dance. If a serious illness excites general sympathy, and a desire to help, a dance is arranged, and the whole night is spent in gyrating round a drum. If there is to be a fight, a dance is started, and through the night they circle about a fetish image, calling upon it to work confusion and death among their enemies. If a victory is to be commemorated, the drums beat a joyful, defiant note, and, firing their guns and waving their knives, amid much laughter and covered with perspiration, they shake their bodies and try to excel each other in their antics. A birth, a death, a restoration from a severe illness, a return from a long journey, or the start for a journey, all demand a

dance; and if there is no such ostensible reason, then they will find one, or dance for the mere love of it. They are danced into the world at their birth, and they are danced out of it at their death.

Both married and single women participate in all the dances, except the hunting dance, which is only for men. As will be noted, some of the dances take place at night and continue until the dawn appears; such dances are usually in connection with their fetishes, and are danced through the night because the spirits are then abroad, against whom they are invoking the power of their fetishes. Other dances are for moonlight evenings, or for the glare of the bonfire, and others, such as the dance after a victory, are only performed during the daylight.

All kinds of drums are used—long and short, ovoid, oblong, and round. They are either beaten by the hand, or with a stick, or vibrated by friction. The drum and the beat indicate the kind of dance, as particular drums are used for certain dances. To European eyes there is not much “poetry of movement” about their dances. There is a raising of the shoulders, a wriggling of the buttocks, a quivering of the posterior, and a throwing up of the legs, with occasional jumps in the air. The movements are sometimes suggestive and obscene, and in one or two dances the opposite sexes embrace, such dances leading to much immorality.

In their dances there are two formations—the circle, and opposite lines. In the former they dance round a drum or a fetish image, or both; one or both being placed in the centre of an open space, and the men and women join, without any order, in clapping their hands, chanting a chorus, and shuffling one behind the other; in the latter two lines are formed—one of men and the other of an equal number of women. The drum is placed at one end of the line, and all begin to clap, chant, shuffle, and wriggle together. A man then advances, dancing, and a woman from the opposite line advances a few paces, and they dance thus a few moments, usually a yard or so apart, but sometimes they approach nearer and strike their

abdomens together, then they retire, and others take their places, and so on right down the lines; and thus they proceed over and over again. Those waiting for their turn to advance clap their hands, chant, and wriggle their bodies in a peculiar undulating movement until they shuffle towards their partners in the centre.

The following are the names and particulars of various dances. In their chants and choruses so many obsolete words are used that the singers themselves do not know their meaning. They seem to have become mere nonsense phrases that fit the rhythm of the beaten drum.

1. The *Ekinu* is a fetish dance which continues all night with much palm wine drinking. It is a circular dance, and is performed while the "doctor" (*ngang' a lembe*) is making medicine for his patient. The fetish is put in the middle of the circle, and the drum behind the patient. The drum is beaten, the rattle shaken, and the people sing a chorus which literally translated is: "Chalk which gave me life on the Ngoyo Road" (*Luvemba luampene o moyo o njela Ngoyo*). Ngoyo is a name for Kabinda, a country north of the Congo River, and this ceremony and song are said to have been introduced by a Kabinda "doctor" who visited this part of the country, but the original sense has been lost.

If the *Mbambi* fetish is used the chorus sung is: "Oh! these storms, that Mbambi fetish" (*Ngwa e tembwa' yi mbambi yuna*). Again the real meaning is lost, and perhaps some of the original words. As the drum is beaten the "doctor" drives the fetish power into the sick man, and he, being excited by the drumming, rattling, and singing, jumps on the nearest roof, tears handfuls of grass from it, and leaps on and off the roof like a madman. The "doctor" after a time drops the juices of certain leaves and stems on him to soothe and quieten him. The sick man is then supposed to get better, and having had the fetish power put into him, he himself becomes a "doctor," and can practise curing others. When a woman, in this manner, comes under the sway of the fetish power she becomes a female "doctor," and takes the name of *nengudi*.

This *Ekinu* dance is performed at the christening ceremony of a sprite child, when the doctor is called to remove the evil that may be in the child on account of its being an incarnation of a water-sprite (see page 113).

There is also a similar dance and ceremony observed over girls with the names of *Nkenge* and *Nsona*, and boys with the names of *Lubaki* and *Mbaki*, but the reason for the performance of the ceremony is lost in their case. *Nkenge* and *Nsona* are the names of two market days, and are given to such girls as are born on those days. There must be something special about some of the four days of their week, as in some districts they never bury on either *Nkenge* or *Konzo*, but only on *Nsona* and *Nkandu*. There are, therefore, children born on certain days who require an all-night dance to free them from some evil, and other days upon which the dead may not be buried. Have they lucky and unlucky days?

2. The *Nloko* dance, which means removing of witch power (from *loka*=to bewitch, and its reversive, *lokola*), is a circular one, and is performed for the following reasons: (a) If a person has been ill for a very long time, and one after another of the "doctors" has failed to cure him; the various "doctors" then bring their fetish images, charms, and drums, all of which they place in the centre, and the adult men and women dance round them; and after a time they form a procession and parade the streets of the village. These circular dances and parades continue alternately all through the night, and it is supposed that the sum total of all the strength of the fetishes present will destroy the witch who is retarding the recovery of the patient. The evil spirits being about at night, that is assumed to be the best time to deal with them. (b) As a war dance, *i.e.* before a fight begins and as it proceeds (see under Warfare, page 192).

3. The *Nsundi* is danced in the daytime, or in the evening moonlight, by men and women, boys and girls. A very high drum is used, and the men wear skins, or cloths in imitation of skins, and these are thrown about by the knees and thighs of the wearers as they jump about in the dance. The dancer who swirls his skins about in the most approved fashion is praised

as the best performer, hence this dance is always executed in a good light. The formation is in two lines one opposite the other.

4. The *Etutu* is a very old dance, and in it the friction drum was used, but is now reserved for the "witch-finder"; besides the friction drum, some drums and reed pipes or whistles formed the band. Now a large drum with a big hole in the bottom, to make it sound well, is employed instead of the friction drum. The dancers carry long sticks in their hands, with bells, or anything that jingles, fixed to the top ends. It is danced by a line of men and a line of women, who work their shoulders as well as their legs. This dance is also known by three other names. Through the skin head of the friction drum (*dingwiti*) is a strong cord knotted at the end to keep it from being pulled through, and at the other end is a smooth stick. The fingers are wetted and the stick drawn through them, and the drum head vibrates, giving out a peculiar note as the stick slips through the fingers. A similar dance to this is the *Lu-ngondongo*, but with a different beat on the drum and another chorus for chanting.

5. To the outsider the *Sala* dance is the most interesting of all the native dances, for this reason, if for no other, that it shows the oneness of human vanity all the world over. A medium drum is used, and the formation is in two lines, one of each sex. They make up songs about one another, and the dance often ends in a general *fracas*. In this dance the following exhibition of pride frequently takes place: During the dance the chief or important man arrives, and someone not belonging to his family or town goes to the drum, and by beating carries on a conversation with himself—asking questions and replying to them. Thus he begins: "Welcome to you, Chief A. Are you quite well?" "I am quite well," replies the drummer. "Have you come a long way?" "No, only from my town." "Are you very rich?" "Yes, I have plenty of wives, slaves, pigs, goats, cloth, and beads. I am so rich that I do not know how rich I really am. I do not know what to do with my wealth. It fills my bags, boxes, and houses." "Have you much money with you?" "Yes, my shoulder-



bags and bundles are full." "Give me some of it, as you are so rich," and so on in fulsome flattery. The foolish chief, in the vanity and pride of the moment, and to win the admiration of those present, will hand over a sum equal to fifteen or twenty shillings, or more—a large amount for these people.

After this, one of the men who came with Chief A will then go to the drum and carry on a similar conversation about the chief of the town, or some other chief present (but not his own chief), and draw money out of him. If the largesse is mean and disappoints the drummer, tap, tap will go the drum and a song on stinginess will be beaten out and words will be bandied about from side to side; and what started as an innocent dance will end in a general row, and bad blood will be engendered for many a day to come. But, if the gift is generous, fulsome praise and honeyed flattery will be beaten on the drum, and everybody will be pleased.

Some time ago a band of players and dancers went from Vianga to Matadi (both these towns are in the Ngombe Lutete district near Wathen) to entertain Chief Dimbu and his folk. The Vianga folk had an idea that they would be meanly treated, so they laid their plans accordingly. They called a prominent Matadi player, and arranged with him to praise the Vianga people in the usual way, and one of the Vianga men would give him twenty francs, which amount he was to return in consideration of a percentage of what the Matadi chief would give. The plan worked well for the Vianga players and their accomplice, for Chief Dimbu, seeing twenty francs given, felt compelled to surpass that, and eventually handed over thirty francs to the Vianga dancers. This was not the first time that a plot of this kind was arranged and carried to a successful issue.

6. The *Boela* is a circular dance to the beating of a medium-sized drum. The cloth worn for it is first held under the armpits, then the belt is tied tightly round the waist, and the upper part of the cloth is allowed to fall in folds. 7. The *Nsanga* is danced after a fight in which no one has been either killed or wounded. There is no formation of circles or lines, but just a crowd of folk who shout, wave knives, and fire off guns to the sounding beat of a big drum. 8. The *Madiumba*





*By courtesy of*

#### THE TOWN BAND

*Sir H. H. Johnston, G.C.M.G.*

The band plays at funerals, weddings, ceremonial visits of chiefs, etc. *Eléko* is a chord of music, and the ivory horns are set to a common chord. In the left-hand corner is a man with a seed capsule which he plays as an ocarina.



is a circular dance performed to the playing of the marimba only. 9. The *Nkongo* or hunter's dance is mentioned under hunting (on page 182).

10. The *Ngom' a nkamu*, as its name indicates, is danced at the talking of big palavers. At a great palaver the advocates or orators, who state the cases for their clients, speak for many hours, and to give them an occasional rest, and to revive the flagging interest of the onlookers, a drum is beaten and a woman dances for ten or fifteen minutes. *Ejieta* is the finishing-off movement in a line dance, and means to go round for a turn or two in a circle as a wind-up to the dance.<sup>1</sup>

On dark nights when dancing is not desired, or on cold, rainy days when the folk wish to sit around their fires, they pass the time in asking conundrums of each other. The word for a riddle is *ngwala*, and this is also the word for gin; and in the giving, receiving, &c. of a conundrum there is a play on the double meaning of the word. The person who desires to propound a conundrum starts thus:

*Ngwala yeye*=here is gin, *i.e.* here is a riddle.

*Ta e ngwala*=pour out the gin, *i.e.* let us have the riddle (or *twasa e ngwala*=bring the gin).

If the people asked cannot state the answer, they say to the propounder of the riddle: *Nua e ngwala*=drink the gin, *i.e.* give us the answer, for we cannot guess it.

It will be obvious that for a proper appreciation of the force of their conundrums it is necessary to have a knowledge of their customs, and especially of their language, consequently one cannot give more than two or three examples of such as are easily explained. The phrases in italics are the conundrums and their answers: 1. *You can open the basket of a water-sprite, but you cannot shut it.* Answer: *Palm-nut*, when once broken it cannot be mended. 2. *My mother made a farm and threw up two heaps.* Answer: *Sun and moon*. 3. *A little branch but a hundred pigeons feed on it.* Answer: *Market*,

<sup>1</sup> Other names for dances are: *Ntuta*, *Kinkubula*, *Nkombo*, *Makuta*, *Ngwinda*, *Nzoko*, and *Manyanga*, but these are more or less modifications of those already mentioned, or mere local names for dances with a slightly different movement.

which is small in size but has a lot of people on it. 4. *They are not by the same mother but their names are alike.* Answer: *Lunguba-nguba* (=small wild peanuts), and *nguba* (=ordinary cultivated peanuts). 5. *A dead twig carries that which has life.* Answer: *Wine-gatherer's hoop*, by which he walks, or climbs, up the palm tree.

Another amusement for around the fire is the telling of jungle stories in which animals speak and act as human beings, and express the wisdom and craftiness of the tribe in word and deed. These stories are told with much dramatic action, and the movements of the animals speaking are often imitated. In the book<sup>1</sup> already referred to, the writer has given an account of the stories, and examples of forty of them; and as an illustration of them he transcribes one of them here.

“I. HOW THE SPARROW SET THE ELEPHANT AND THE CROCODILE  
TO PULL AGAINST EACH OTHER

“While the Elephant was searching for food one day he happened to pass near a Sparrow's nest, and accidentally knocking against the branch, he nearly threw the eggs to the ground. The Sparrow thereupon said to the Elephant:

“‘You walk very proudly, and not looking where you are going; you nearly upset my nest. If you come this way again I will tie you up.’

“‘Truly you are a little bird,’ the Elephant laughingly replied, ‘and are you able to tie up me—an Elephant?’

“‘Indeed,’ the Sparrow answered him, ‘if you come this way to-morrow, I will bind you.’

“‘All right,’ said the Elephant. ‘I will now pass on, and will come back here to-morrow to look upon the strength of a Sparrow.’ So the Elephant went his way, and the Sparrow flew off to bathe in a neighbouring river.

“On reaching the river, and finding a Crocodile asleep at her favourite bathing-place, the Sparrow said: ‘Wake up! this is my bathing-place, and if you come here again, I will tie you up.’

<sup>1</sup> *Congo Life and Folklore*, pp. 361-463. John H. Weeks. Religious Tract Society, 1911.

“‘Can a little Sparrow like you tie up a Crocodile?’ the Crocodile asked her.

“‘It is true what I tell you,’ retorted the Sparrow, ‘and if you return here to-morrow I will fasten you up.’

“‘Very well,’ replied the Crocodile, ‘I will come to-morrow to see what you can do.’ And with that the Crocodile floated away, and the Sparrow returned to her nest.

“The next day the Sparrow, seeing the Elephant coming, said to him, ‘Yesterday I told you not to come this way again, because you endangered my nest. Now I will tie you as I warned you.’

“‘All right,’ said the Elephant. ‘I want to see what a little thing like you can do.’

“The Sparrow then brought a strong vine rope, and putting it round the neck of the Elephant, she said to him, ‘Wait a moment while I go and have a drink of water, and then you will see how strong I am.’ To which the Elephant replied, ‘Go and drink plenty of water, for to-day I want to see what a Sparrow can do.’ So the Sparrow went and found the Crocodile basking in the sun on the river’s bank.

“‘Oh! you are here again,’ she said. ‘I will tie you up as I warned you yesterday, because you do not listen to what you are told.’ ‘Very well,’ sneered the Crocodile, ‘come and tie me up and I will see what strength you have.’

“The Sparrow took the other end of the rope and tied it round the Crocodile, and said, ‘Wait a moment, I will go a little higher up the hill and pull.’ So away she flew up the hill on to a tree, and from there she cried out, ‘Pull Elephant, pull Crocodile. It is I, the Sparrow.’ So the Elephant pulled, and the Crocodile pulled, and each thought he was pulling against the Sparrow; not knowing they were pulling against each other. All day long they pulled, until the evening, but neither outpulled the other. And during the whole day the Sparrow was crying out, ‘Pull, Elephant, you have the strength; pull harder, Elephant.’ And in the same way she addressed the Crocodile.

“At last the Crocodile said, ‘Friend Sparrow, I cannot pull any more; come and unfasten me, and I will never come to your bathing-place again.’

“‘Wait a little while,’ replied the Sparrow; ‘I am going up to my village.’ And the Elephant said as she drew near, ‘Now I know you are very strong. Please come and undo me, and I will never come again to shake your nest.’ So the Sparrow loosened the Elephant, and then went and removed the rope from the Crocodile’s neck; and from that time the Sparrow has never been troubled by either the Elephant or the Crocodile.”

The following three stories have not been published before, and are illustrative of native thought. There are probably no true gazelles in Africa, but the name gazelle is more suggestive of the small, gentle, timid creature called by the natives *nsexi* than the name antelope would be, hence I have used gazelle as a translation of the word *nsexi*.

## II. THE GAZELLE PUNISHES THE LEOPARD FOR GREEDINESS

One day the Gazelle and the Leopard went for a walk through a forest in search of palm-grubs. As they were passing down one of the paths they saw a fine bunch of palm-nuts, and the Leopard said, “Friend Gazelle, wait here while I climb the tree and cut down the nuts.”

With his strong, sharp claws the Leopard soon mounted the palm tree and found there three bunches of ripe nuts, but instead of cutting them down, he sat on a frond and began to eat them.

By and by the Gazelle shouted out, “Throw me down some of the nuts.” And to this request the Leopard replied, “When I am eating palm-nuts I cannot hear anything.”

The Gazelle waited a little time, and then called out again. “Please throw me some of the nuts, for I have hoofs and cannot climb a tree like you.” But the Leopard ate on greedily, and took no notice of his friend’s request.

The Gazelle went and gathered some firewood and grass, and made a large fire at the bottom of the palm tree. In a short time, the Leopard cried out, “Uncle Gazelle, put out your fire; the heat and smoke are choking me.” The Gazelle, however, answered him, saying, “When I am warming myself



by the fire I cannot hear anything"; and he threw some more wood and grass on the fire. The Leopard, choking, lost his grip on the tree, and fell to the ground dead. The Gazelle returned to the town and took possession of all the Leopard's goods.

### III. THE GAZELLE AND THE LEOPARD GO TO MARKET TOGETHER

One day the Leopard found a market where peanuts were in great demand, and the price given allowed of a large profit. But this market was always held very early in the morning, and there was a law that anyone who brought charcoal on to the market would be put to death. The Leopard returned at once to his town, and bought up a large quantity of peanuts, which he tied into a load ready for carrying to the market. When all was ready he asked the Antelope (*mpalanga*) to go with him, and upon the Antelope consenting to do so, the Leopard collected a lot of charcoal and tied it up in a bundle to resemble the load of peanuts.

The next morning the Leopard gave the heavy load of peanuts to the Antelope, and carried the light load of charcoal himself. That night they reached the town quite near to the market, where the people gave them a large quantity of palm wine to drink. The Leopard said, "Friend Antelope, we will drink all the palm wine, and then we shall sleep well." And he supplied his friend with wine, but took very little himself. At last they went into the house to sleep, and when the Leopard saw that the Antelope was fast asleep, he changed the loads, putting his own in place of the Antelope's.

In the morning they started early for the market, each picking up his load from the places they had put them overnight. On reaching the market the Leopard opened out his peanuts and quickly sold them. While he was selling them the Antelope wanted to open out his bundle also, but the Leopard stopped him, saying, "Wait until I have sold mine, then sell yours."

By and by the Antelope opened his bundle and out fell the charcoal. Directly the people on the market saw the charcoal they ran on the Antelope, tied him up, and prepared to kill

him. The Leopard said to them, "You will give me the head, for it belongs to me." The head was cut off and given to the Leopard, who after eating it returned to his town. When he arrived there they asked him, "Where is your companion who went with you to the market?" "He got stealing on the market," replied the Leopard, "and the people killed him."

Each time the Leopard visited the market he returned without his companion, for he played the same trick on everyone, until at last all in the town were afraid to go with him. One day the Leopard went to the Gazelle, and said to him, "Uncle Gazelle, will you go with me to sell peanuts at the market?"

"No," replied the Gazelle, "for I have plenty of work to do."

The Leopard, however, would not take his refusal, but said, "Please, Uncle Gazelle, go with me, and we shall be back in two or three days, and you can then finish your work." So the Gazelle promised to accompany the Leopard to the market.

When they started the Leopard gave the Gazelle the bundle of peanuts to carry, and at first he would not carry them, but wanted the other load. The Leopard, however, assured him that his load was too heavy for him to carry, and they began their journey. About noon they reached a stream, and the Gazelle proposed that they should have a swim. The bundles were put down by the side of the road, and they went along the bank of the stream, and found a good pool.

The Gazelle said, "Uncle Leopard, I am going to dive into the water; you count and see how long I am under the water."

"All right, I will count," replied the Leopard. The Gazelle dived, and then walked along under the water to where the bundles were placed, and undoing the Leopard's load, he saw the charcoal in it; quickly tying it up again he returned to where he had left the Leopard. "Oh! Oh!" said the Leopard, "you know how to dive."

They reached the town where they were to sleep, and the people welcomed them, and gave them plenty of palm wine. "Uncle Gazelle," said the Leopard, "let us drink it all, and then we shall sleep soundly." "Very well," replied the Gazelle; and they each pretended to drink deeply, and at

sunset they ate their food and went into the house to sleep. In a very little time the Gazelle snored loudly, and the Leopard, hearing the snores, got up and changed the bundles; but the Gazelle saw him out of his half-shut eyes. He waited a long time until he was sure the Leopard was asleep, and then he changed the bundles again.

In the morning they awoke early and went to the market, the Leopard thinking all the time that the Gazelle had the bundle of charcoal. On arriving at the market the Gazelle opened his bundle at once and sold all his peanuts. When the Leopard saw the peanuts he commenced to quake with fear, and did not want to open his bundle; but the people wished for peanuts so badly that they insisted on him opening his load, and selling his peanuts. They said, "Why do you bring peanuts to market, and then want to carry them away again?" and in anger they took the bundle from him and opened it, and out fell the charcoal. They jumped on the Leopard, tied him up, cut off his head, and gave it to the Gazelle, who then returned to his town, and told the people there all that had happened to him on the road, and how the Leopard had been the cause of many of their friends being killed at the market because of his treacherous trick; and they all rejoiced at the Leopard's death.

#### IV. THE MONKEY AND THE LEOPARD'S DAUGHTER

There was once in the forest a Leopard, whose daughter was the most beautiful in all the country. She was a good hunter, very fleet of foot, and her marks were very bright and clear. All the animals wished to marry her, but the old Leopard wanted to keep her skill for himself; he therefore refused all offers for his daughter, until the animals all came to him and insisted that he should set a test, and let the winner marry the daughter.

The Leopard then divided some land into equal-sized patches, and said that his daughter should be the wife of the one who could eat everything green in a patch between the sunrise and sunset of one day.

On the appointed day all the animals gathered to watch

the one who desired to try first for the beautiful Leopard. The first to make the attempt was a small Antelope, but he tripped round the patch, and ate daintily the youngest and tenderest tips only of the shoots; and by the end of the day no one could see that any animal had been feeding on it.

The next to try was a Goat, and though he could eat almost anything, even he failed to clear the patch. Then came the wild Pig, and he ate very greedily and made a big clearance along one side of the patch. He ate and grunted until he could not stand, and then he laid down and ate, but he had to stop before the patch was cleared. The Elephant then took his turn, and although he could tear up the grass by the roots, he also failed to eat everything green on his patch.

The animals were going away in anger from the old Leopard, who was jeering them because they had failed to win his daughter, when a little blue-faced Monkey sprang forward and said, "Please, Uncle Leopard, let me try." All the animals forgot their anger, and began to laugh at the Monkey for thinking he could succeed where they had all failed. The Leopard, however, consented to his having a try for the great prize. "I am always a thirsty little animal," said the Monkey, "so to-morrow when I am eating my patch you will let me go and drink water?" He looked so small, and it seemed so impossible for him to win, that they assented to his request.

Next morning the crowd of animals gathered to see the Monkey eat; but during the night the Monkey had gone through the forest collecting all his friends and relatives, and hiding them near the place of trial. As the sun rose the Monkey began to eat his patch, and after a time he went off to the stream for a drink, and one of his friends took his place in the patch. This continued all day long—as soon as one Monkey was full he went to drink water, and another took his place, and as the sun was getting very near to the ground the Monkey ate the last blades of grass and leaves, and was proclaimed the winner of the beautiful Leopard as his wife. He married her and took her away to his town.

## CHAPTER XIII

### COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE <sup>1</sup>

THE young man in search of a wife must observe certain customs regulating his choice. He must not marry any of his father's wives; or his sister; or his maternal cousins; or his maternal nieces; or the children of his sister; or his wife's sister, either before or after his wife's death; or his mother-in-law; or his niece's step-mother; or his step-sister, for by the marriage of his father with his step-sister's mother they have become brother and sister; or his own children. Among those not within the degree of prohibition are second cousins, and the daughter of his daughter, and the reason for the latter is that she belongs to her mother's family and not to his family. Where father-right exists the degrees of affinity and prohibition are very similar to our own; but where mother-right is strictly observed, as on the Lower Congo, the degrees of affinity are closer and more extensive on the mother's side than on the father's. The maternal relative he must not marry, he is allowed to marry, if she is only a paternal one. There is no hard and fast rule, but it is generally understood that the sons and daughters of one clan should marry the daughters and sons of one other clan only, and not intermarry with several different clans. By thus intermarrying within the limits of one clan they think better treatment is ensured for the women of each clan.

Observing the above limitations, the young man who wants to marry is not restricted in his choice to the women of his own town or clan, but is free to select whom he likes. Having set his heart on a certain girl, he is not allowed to speak to her, or offer her any presents; but to gain her, the first thing

See Appendix, Note III, p. 306, for list of kinship terms.



he has to do is to take a calabash of palm wine to the girl's maternal uncle (*ngudi a nkazi*), and mention to him the desire of his heart. Should the uncle listen favourably to his suit, he thanks the young man for the wine, and drinks it; but this does not pledge him in any way to give him his niece in marriage, it is simply a sign of goodwill. Having drunk the wine, the uncle sets food and drink before the young man, and without giving him a decided answer, he tells him to return on a stated day.

On the appointed day the young man, carrying more palm wine, revisits the girl's uncle, who having drunk the wine states whether he is willing or not for him to marry his niece. Should he be willing he informs the aspirant to his niece's hand that he wants, as marriage money, 100, 200, or more packets of blue pipe beads, according to the position of the girl's family and the suitor's wealth (in a packet there are one hundred strings of one hundred beads each, costing about two shillings).<sup>1</sup> This is a guarantee that the girl will be properly treated. The word to marry is *sompa*=to borrow, to hire, and this is the essence of the contract; the man borrows or hires the woman, and in return for the use of the woman he lends, on his part, a certain amount of money to the woman's family. One of the results of such a contract is that their interests are rarely identical. The amount demanded as marriage money is often haggled over and reduced; but she is a proud girl for whom a larger sum than usual is paid.

The man now counts over such wealth as he has in hand, applies to his family to help him, and sets about trading, working, &c. to make up the deficiency; and when some months later the uncle is informed that the marriage money is ready, either in beads or their equivalent in goats, pigs, powder, cloth, &c., he takes some palm wine and goes to the

<sup>1</sup> About 1855 Nlemvo's father paid only fifty-five small, oval-shaped, red beads for his wife (Nlemvo's mother). Such beads were then very scarce and dear, but are now only worth ten a penny. In 1883 a woman cost about thirty pieces of cloth, worth 2s. 6d. invoice price, and 6s. at San Salvador.





*Lent by*

### LOCUST EATING A MOUSE

*Rev. J. L. Forfeitt*

The locusts had swept the district of Ngangila clean of vegetation, and then becoming hungry they started on insects, etc., and this locust was found with a mouse in its mandibles. The original is in the British Museum.



young man's town to count the marriage money. This is not done without much chaffering about the value in beads of the goats, pigs, &c., but being satisfactorily accomplished a day is fixed for introducing the girl's father to his future son-in-law; and on that occasion both the uncle and the father take calabashes of palm wine to the suitor, who, calling his friends as witnesses, they all drink first the uncle's wine, and then the father's, after which the marriage money is paid, and the father, receiving his small portion, drops entirely out of all subsequent proceedings. So far as the uncle, the father, and the intending bridegroom are concerned the marriage arrangements are completed; but they cannot be consummated until the mother gives her consent. If the mother thinks that the girl is not old enough, *i.e.* that her daughter's breasts are not properly formed, she withholds her permission. The girl may cook and take food to her intended husband, but if he commits fornication with her, without the consent of her family, he forfeits all the money he has paid on her account, and no chief will take his side to justify or help him. The people use a proverb respecting this kind of fornication: "The sugar-canes are rotten at the roots," *i.e.* the man is bad at heart.

The man seeking to marry soon, finds it wise to conciliate the girl's mother, and gain her consent with small presents, and much show of respectful deference; otherwise, although he will eventually receive the girl for whom he has paid the marriage money, he will have in his mother-in-law a termagant whose spiteful tongue will quickly destroy his domestic peace, for by her constant nagging she will set her daughter against him. While investigating domestic quarrels I have again and again traced them to the mother-in-law, and then by further inquiry it has come to light that the primary cause was that the man was disrespectful to his future mother-in-law, and had not recognised her by small, dutiful gifts.

A woman is not permitted to break her engagement of marriage with a man. Should she, after betrothal, exhibit a strong desire to resist the wishes of her family, they will tie her up and send her bound to her husband. If, however, she

wins them over, they can break off the engagement by returning the marriage money, and by paying one or two pigs as a fine. Should the man desire to break off negotiations, he must forfeit what he has paid on account, and also pay a fine of a pig or goat, according to his circumstances, to the chief of the girl's town. In the San Salvador district there were two girls who were betrothed to be married to two men in the neighbourhood. When the girl's mother was dying she called her son, their brother, and told him that if ever he left the district he was to take his sisters with him. By and by he wanted to live in the Ngombe Lutete district, about five day's journey from his home, so he called the two men and offered to return the marriage money they had paid, but as they refused to accept it he had to obtain two other women and give them to the men as substitutes for his sisters, and with each woman he gave a pig, which was called "changing the name."

Just before marriage the man will ask his fiancée how many men she has been with since her betrothal. The number of men before her engagement does not count. She may deny that she has slept with any, but no one will believe her, and, if she persists in the denial, he will threaten to test her by the "ordeal of the bracelet" (see page 264). She will then confess that she has been, say, with five men. The man, thereupon, goes to the girl's family and complains that they have not looked properly after her, for their daughter confesses that she has slept with five different men, whose names are So-and-so. The family calls these men, and if they acknowledge the truthfulness of the girl's statement they are mulct in a fine ranging from five to twenty-five shillings in beads or their equivalent. If they repudiate the charge as false they are compelled, by public opinion, to drink the "nkasa" ordeal, and thus prove their innocence. In charges of this kind a woman's word is always taken before a man's; and there is no redress for the man under such an accusation except to take the ordeal, and if it proves him guiltless, he can claim heavy compensation from his accusers.

Among fairly well-to-do and rich families there is generally

a pretence of taking the wife by force. When all is settled the bridegroom goes on the appointed day with a few of his male friends to the bride's town; and as they draw near they fire guns, shout, and make as great a noise as possible. This is an indication of the bridegroom's importance, and a method of honouring the bride. On arrival at the girl's house there is a sham struggle, and at last the girl is carried off kicking, screaming, and protesting. This is what is called carrying, or lifting the woman (*nata nkento*). On reaching his own town, the bridegroom tells the young men to fetch the drums and plenty of palm wine. The festivities last from two days to a week, according to the wealth of the bridegroom; great crowds gather, much wine is drunk, many goats and pigs are killed and eaten, and there is a frequent firing of guns. The bride goes without food on the day before her marriage; and the new wife must not eat in the presence of her husband for three or four months; and even after this time has passed a woman rarely eats before her husband, but takes her food round the corner out of sight of the male members of her family, and eats it either by herself, or with the other women and girls, and the male children that are not old enough to eat with the men. In fact men and youths consider it beneath their dignity to eat with women and girls.

When the festivities are over, and the guests have gone, the elders meet and give the girl into the hands of the new husband, and they instruct them both in the presence of witnesses. To the woman, they say: "You are to respect your husband and his family, and you are to behave properly in your house." Then turning to the man they say: "You are to respect your wife and her family; you must not speak harshly to her, nor treat her as a slave, nor stamp on her things, nor tread her beneath your feet." And speaking again to the woman, they continue thus: "And you woman, you have never had thieving or witch-palavers in the past, continue without them, and conduct yourselves properly towards each other."

Thereupon the man goes to one of the witnesses, and taking

him by the wrist, he rubs a bullet on the palm of the witness's hand, and says: "I have heard all the words spoken, and if I destroy the marriage, may I die by this bullet." The woman also takes the same oath. When this ceremony is completed the elders enter the house of the newly-married couple to arrange the hearthstones, and to teach the bride concerning her duties as a wife; and also to see if the bridegroom is able to consummate the marriage; and should he be unable, the marriage is broken off and the money returned. Sometimes, on account of the shame, the marriage is not dissolved, but the husband finds a suitable young man and permits him to have intercourse with his wife, and should there be a child it is treated by the husband as his own. After instructing the bride and her husband the girl's relatives are sent off with all due respect and with suitable presents. When the wife gives birth to a child the father at once informs her family. It must be remembered that where mother-right prevails the whole purpose of the marriage arrangements is to increase the woman's family, not the man's, and anything that helps to the attainment of this object is sanctioned, and, on the other hand, everything that stands in the way is used as a reason for breaking off the marriage.

The above describes the ordinary course that the marriage negotiations take when a girl either likes the man, or, thinking that one man is as good as another, treats the affair with indifference. A man can generally tell whether or not he is acceptable to the woman upon whom he has set his heart; but should he have any doubt on the matter, or if he is desirous of an intrigue with a married woman, he goes to a medicine-man (of the *mbumba* order; *mbumba*=secret, mystery, magic), and buys a love philtre. The medicine-man takes a bit of fowl's claw, a piece of a certain shrub, a part of a particular kind of water reed that has a root with a turpentine odour (*nsaku-nsaku*), a piece of a large Calabar-like bean (*ngongo*), and some seeds of a small gourd; these ingredients he pounds and mixes well together, and puts into a bottle of palm wine and hands to his client, who takes the first opportunity of giving a portion secretly to the woman whose love he desires. If she drinks it,



she will leave all to follow the man who paid for its preparation. The women have no love-philtre to attract the love of the men they want.

A man may marry as many women as he can find the marriage money for. By marrying several women he expects to receive some profit from his share of his daughters' marriage monies; and as will be seen below, the wife is always worth another woman, if she dies, or the money paid for her, and then if she has daughters there is a share of their marriage money; so a man in marrying stands to gain considerably, and lose nothing. While the man can have as many women as he can afford, the woman, however, can have only one man; and if another man commits adultery with her, he has to pay a heavy fine to her husband. Around San Salvador the husband keeps the fine; but in other parts the fine is divided between the husband and his relatives. If the woman is sterile the man can return her, and he receives either another woman from her family, or his marriage money is returned. Mutual recriminations on this subject is the cause of much unhappiness among the married folk on the Lower Congo; but on the Upper Congo, where father-right is the rule and other views of child-bearing prevail, the matter is treated with indifference.

A woman on the Congo is the best gilt-edged security in which a man can invest his surplus wealth. Pigs, goats, and fowls may die, slaves run away, speculations in trading expeditions may prove a failure, and thus he loses his money; but he rarely if ever loses the money he has invested in a wife. Should she die he takes a calabash of palm wine and going to her family, *i.e.* to her maternal uncle's family, he informs them of the death, and demands another wife in the place of the deceased. If the family has not another woman free for this purpose then the marriage money must be returned in full; but in making up the sum the woman's father does not return the share he received, and the amount is collected without his help. Arising out of this custom is a proverb running thus "The father 'eats' the money, but the uncle pays it," *i.e.* One has the pleasure, but another bears the trouble.

Should, however, the husband die first, his family takes the woman and she becomes the wife of one of his brothers ; if she afterwards dies the one who has her for wife goes with a calabash of palm wine to her maternal uncle, and asks for another wife, or failing that the marriage money, paid by the deceased brother, must be returned in full. This woman, or her marriage money, is the inheritance he has received from his dead brother. A second woman can be demanded on the death of the first, and a third woman on the death of the second, but after the third woman dies all further claims die with her. Of course, if the money is returned in full on the death of the first wife, the contract is finished. The reason for these demands is that the children of the wife do not belong to the husband, but to the wife's family, and he has been breeding children to increase another family than his own. He has lent his money simply as a guarantee of good treatment of the woman loaned to him, and from her death it is apparent that she was not a sound article, therefore she must be replaced, or the goods lent on her returned in full. If afterwards it is proved that she died by witchcraft, that is not his affair ; she and her family should have protected her properly by charms, and the employment of an efficient witch-doctor. A husband is not responsible for keeping his wife in good health ; he neither pays for her charms, her medicines, or her "doctor's" bill. She does not belong to him, but is only loaned to rear children for her family. This aspect of the marital relationship is apparent from the following custom : When a woman becomes *enceinte* her family forbids all further intercourse with her until she has weaned the child—a period of three or four years—and then they take a calabash of wine to the husband, and renew their permission. They believe that intercourse during this period will harm the child, and dry up the supply of milk, so that the baby will die from lack of proper nourishment.

When a slave woman, whose owner belongs to one clan, is married into another clan, she and her children do not belong to the latter clan, for, it is said, "The clan name is not sold

with the fee paid for the woman." At any time the children can return to their mother's owner's clan, and take up their privileges of clanship. Such children are called *ana akwa Kinlaza* (*Kinlaza* being the name of the clan); but children born of a free woman of the *Kinlaza* clan are known as *esi Kinlaza*. Just as a free woman's children belong to her brother, so a slave woman's offspring—when she is married and not sold—belongs to her master, who occupies in regard to her the same position as a brother to a free woman.

A suckling baby is not charged for when its slave mother is sold. If the price of a slave woman is 70s. and she has a babe at her breast no extra money is given for her. "You cannot buy a woman's milk" is the reason given for not paying any extra price. When the child is old enough, it may return to its father if it likes, but the father has no claim upon the child. The same rule is observed in the selling of sheep, pigs, and goats with suckling young; no extra sum is charged, but a man having such for sale would wait until the young one was old enough to leave its mother. The child of a slave mother, even by a free father, is a slave, and goes with the property; but the offspring of a free woman by a slave father is free, and shares any property, because the family is counted through the mother.

Is there much, or any, happiness in these polygamous marriages? I have watched them closely for many years, I have frequently in my capacity of impartial adviser had to listen to the stories of their domestic discords, and recurring quarrels, and for one really happy union there are ninety-nine unhappy ones. There is in many cases a passion for a time, but it quickly burns out, and then the man and woman are fortunate if they can tolerate each other, and cross one another's path in the family round without constant bickering and nagging. When one or the other is meek and submissive the union remains in force until death severs the bonds; but when both the man and the woman are strong-willed and obstinate the tolerant spirit disappears, and a snarling, cat-and-dog life is the result. Where the woman's family has money to spare

they step in, and paying back the marriage money with an extra sum as interest, they release the woman from her miserable position. As a rule, in these marriages, there is no affection to begin with, and generally a lack of that mutual respect that might help them to bear with one another, hence in ninety-nine of these marriages out of a hundred there is an absence of all that we understand by domestic felicity. They are ignorant of anything better, and the majority of the women and the men stolidly accept things as they are concerning their marital relationship. The Christian Church, however, has introduced monogamy as a rule of membership, and this has opened up a new vista to the Congo women; and as they have looked upon the life of these monogamous homes, there has been revealed to them the vision of a happier home life, and a pleasanter marital relationship.

In a former work,<sup>1</sup> I fully discuss the relation of polygamy to morality and child-bearing, and it is not necessary to repeat here about the Lower Congo people what I there stated while writing of the Upper Congo, for I then had the people as a whole in mind; but since writing that work, I have come across Junod's book,<sup>2</sup> and I find from his careful and extensive study of polygamy among the Thonga tribe he fully confirms my view that polygamy does not tend to morality, nor does it make for large families.

<sup>1</sup> See *Among Congo Cannibals*, p. 134 *et seq.*, published by Seeley, Service & Co., for a full discussion of this question.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of a South African Tribe*, p. 273, by Henri A. Junod.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SALUTATIONS, BLESSINGS, AND CURSES

THE Congo people are very punctilious in their greetings of each other, and any carelessness either in saluting or responding is considered rude and discourteous in the extreme, and is consequently resented. To greet is *monana*=to see one another, or *kayisa*=to welcome.

On meeting the question is asked, "Have you slept?" (*olele kwaku e ?*), and the answer is, "I have slept" (*ndele kwame*); or, "Have you eaten?" (*odidi kwaku e ?*), and the suitable answer is, "I have eaten" (*ndidi kwame*). The tone and emphasis put on the interrogative particle *e* indicates the amount of goodwill and friendliness existing between the persons thus greeting. Sometimes the equivalent of "good" (*kwambote*) is introduced into both the question and answer, but it scarcely takes the place of the amount of feeling that can be put into the *e* of interrogation. Occasionally as a greeting, especially to white folk, a mongrel "Good morning" is heard expressed thus, "Morning good" (*mene mene ambote*); but it is not so natural and pleasing as the proper native greetings, and is not encouraged by those who desire to maintain all that is best in native customs and ways.

On parting, those leaving say, "Abide well" (*sala kiabiza*), and those staying behind respond, "Go well" (*wenda kiabiza*); but women on bidding adieu to men and to women use in the place of *kiabiza* a word (*miangana*) that means prettiness, smartness, niceness. Hence their way of saying "Abide well," and "Go well" is *sala miangana*, and *nda miangana*. Those who are leaving the village for a journey, or returning to their homes in another village, go round to their friends and acquaintances to bid them farewell (*kanina*), and those whose



friends are leaving "send them straight" (*xindika*), and if they are desirous of showing special courtesy to the departing ones they escort them on the road (*fila mu njila*). If it is evening, the farewell phrase is, "Remain, and sleep well" (*sala, leka kiabiza*), and the response is, "Go, and sleep well" (*xwenda, leka kiabiza*). To sleep well is regarded as a sign of good health, and to eat is also an indication of the same.

Men on returning from a journey, or on a visit to the town, are greeted with "We welcome you" (*tukayisi*), or "We bless you" (*tusambwidi*), and the reply is a very respectful, "Yes, sir" (*ingeta*, or *inga*). Sometimes the greeting will be, "We see each other" (*tumonana*), when each person will clap three times. No answer is given to a greeting that is considered to be impertinent. When strangers or young friends pass one another on the road a jocular greeting is given, which is equal to "Divide up, give something" (*nukaya*), and is a joking way of saying, "Stand and deliver." To this there are several answers, such as, "I have nothing in my bag or I would give it to you"; or, "If you eat an antelope save me the skin." To a jocular use of "We bless you" (*tusambwidi*) the equally joking answer is given, "I am on the tip of a palm frond"; and a laughing reply to a woman's greeting of, "We wish you prettiness" (*tumiangana*) is, "I have not anointed myself with palm oil, or I might look pretty."

When an ordinary man goes into the presence of the King of Kongo, he kneels on the ground at three points, at the entrance to the courtyard, at the door of the "palace," and immediately in front of the King inside the house. The King can see each of the former positions from his seat in the palace. At the last place the man claps (*sakila nkofo*) four times. The first clap (*bimba mbimbu*) is to call attention to himself and to the fact that he is about to render homage (*kunda*) to his majesty. He then puts the palms of his hands together, rubs his two little fingers on the ground (*xika o ntoto*), and with them makes a dirt mark (*sono*) on his forehead, temples, nose or lips, and claps his hands three times; this ceremony he repeats three times. And to each series of three claps the King re-



sponds by laying his right hand across the palm of his left, palm to palm, so that the four fingers of the right hand are well above the side of the left hand, and those four fingers he waves to and fro. This indicates the acceptance of the homage (*tambula e bensawu*) by the King; but if the man has displeased him in some small way, or is a mere nobody, the King will simply extend one hand and wave the fingers in a careless, indifferent fashion. The man, receiving such disrespectful notice of his homage, will carefully review his actions to find out wherein he has offended his majesty, and he will perhaps remember that he made certain profits on a trading journey, or a business transaction, and had forgotten to send the King a share—the matter is quickly and wisely remedied. Should the King for some big reason resent the homage being paid to him, he will thrust out his foot and move his toes as a sign of his anger, and for the man who sees the King's toes move instead of his fingers, the sooner he removes himself out of the King's presence, and the greater distance he goes, the better it will be for his health, unless he is able to send an exceedingly large present to appease the wrath of the King.<sup>1</sup>

Slaves and very common people will go through the form of paying homage at each of the three places at which they kneel as they approach the King; and even an ordinary man will do it, if he thinks that by this extra show of servility he can ingratiate himself with the King. Chiefs and nobles will sometimes make a perfunctory show of paying homage by a kind of bow as they approach him, and then sitting down in front of him and rubbing their fingers in the dirt and clapping. His near relatives will sit down and simply clap. His wives according to their position, and the degree in which they are in his favour, will be more or less ceremonious in the observance of the rites of homage.

When an ordinary man salutes a chief, he performs the above ceremony twice only, and the chief answers twice in the same manner as the King. To a high noble, who is not the

<sup>1</sup> This method of paying homage to the King is mentioned very briefly in the chapter on "Court Etiquette and Native Functionaries."

chief of a village or town, the ceremony is observed once only. Near relatives of the King may sit on seats, chairs, &c., in his presence, but all others must sit on the ground: mats or skins are allowed, but nothing that will raise them above the earth. Thirty years ago the King would not permit a man to own a European chair for use in his own house in the town; a man who exchanged a goat for one with a trader he threatened to accuse of witchcraft unless he got rid of the chair, which he accordingly did.

When equals and relatives meet, they clap once only to each other, slightly stooping as they do so. It should be stated that a native clap is different from our clapping—they slightly arch the hands and bring them together across each other so that the top of the right thumb is at the base of the left thumb, the concussion of the air thus enclosed giving a different sound to our smacking when we clap our hands. Strangers meeting simply clap hands to each other; and I have seen the following salutation between acquaintances: the men met and deliberately sat down, they clapped to each other, crossed their hands so that the right and left hands of each took the right and left hands of the other, they raised their hands and dropped them loosely. This clapping and touching of hands they solemnly repeated three times, and then began to talk.

On saying good-bye to each other, they pretend to spit on the forehead and hands of the departing one, and on some grass, which after being spat upon, they stick in the hair of the beloved one leaving them. The former is to bring good luck, and the grass is to keep away evil spirits.

There are two kinds of spitting: 1. *Taulwila nsambu* is to spit a blessing, or to express a blessing by pretending to spit on the beloved one, as a parent on a child, &c. When this is done the one who blesses says, "May you possess all that a person should have, may you have blessings and good luck, and may your words find favour with the people." (*Ovwa kiuma kiarwidi muntu, ovwa nsambu yo malau, wata diambu ditonda muntu*). This form of blessing is greatly valued by children,

but it is not lightly given by the parent. 2. *Taulwila mete* is to expectorate saliva at anyone, and being equal to a curse it is bitterly resented by the person spat upon.

When a number of people are leaving a town to build elsewhere, or to live in another village, the folk remaining wish them good health, good journey, luck, &c., and finish by saying, "Do not any of you return to bewitch us." Those leaving reciprocate the good wishes, and wind up with the remark, "Do not any of you follow us to bewitch us." And when a caravan is starting on a trading expedition, the members of it say to those left in the town, "Good health, and let no one follow us to give us bad luck in trading," and those left behind reply, "Good journey, and do not any of you return to bewitch us, or carry us to sell to the white trader." The idea underlying these requests is that a living person who is a witch (*ndoki*) can visit a place by his evil spirit (*nkwiya*), and take a person away by witchcraft. The spirit (*nkwiya*) can leave its possessor for evil purposes when he is either asleep or awake, and can travel any distance to accomplish its object. The shell (*evuvu*) of the person is left behind while his spirit takes the journey. The people in the town, or belonging to the caravan, will see the shell—the body, the semblance of the man who is a witch—with them, and acting like a human being, yet his spirit, they believe, has gone on its evil errand. Hence these requests to each other not to be followed and be bewitched.

To curse (*siba*) a child or a near relative who is very bad, obstinate, or self-willed, the curser cuts off a piece of his own cloth, wraps some of his hair in it, and burning the little bundle, he says, "You shall never have children, or you shall never become rich." The children are terribly afraid of these curses, and every cut, accident, illness, or bit of bad luck is placed to the credit of the curse. Perhaps after a time the boy (or girl) alters his conduct, and becoming more amenable to his father's wishes, he expresses a desire to have the curse removed. The father puts three small heaps of dust on each knee, and as the child kneels down before him, the father says,

"I forgive you; I did not curse you in my heart, but only with my tongue, and now from this time have many and strong children, and become rich." The lad shakes or blows off each heap of dust from the knees, and the curse is removed. Should the father die before the lad wishes to have the curse removed he seeks out a namesake of his father, with whom the latter was on friendly terms, and taking a fowl to him, he asks him to remove the curse, which he does in the way described as though he were the father.

Should a girl want to marry a man of whom her family does not approve, or refuses to marry one whom they think suitable, and persists in her opposition to their wishes, they put a curse on her (*dia e kandu*=eat a refusal), which is an absolute and final refusal to agree with her wishes, and a ban or interdiction on her desires; and such an one is called the child of the curse (*mwan' a kandu*). And here again every bit of misfortune that may befall she puts down to the curse that is on her. Lads who desire to take a course in opposition to their parent's wishes are also banned by the same curse. We have had boys in our Wathen school who have had two or three small illnesses, or some nasty knocks while playing at hockey (such cuts and wounds were common to all the lads playing), who have come to us and said that they were "children of the curse" as they had come to school against the expressed wishes of their parents, and that they would not be well, or they would not escape the whacks at hockey, until they had returned home, and gained their families' consent to attend school. The same superstition prevails among adults who are persisting in a course opposed either to their family or to the wishes of the village folk.

The most solemn way of cursing a family, a clan, or a town, and of promulgating a law is that curse (*kandu*) pronounced at the junction of two roads, and confirmed by rubbing the mouth in the dust, and striking the knees with one's hands. No one will risk the terrible misfortune that will follow the breaking of a law thus proclaimed; and any family, clan, or town thus cursed will tremble until they either procure its

removal, or secure the services of a great medicine-man to nullify its effect.

To hit or kick against another's foot in passing, if intentional, is equal to a curse, and will cause a bad quarrel; but if it is done accidentally the man asks for pardon, and will turn round and lightly touch the foot again, to undo, or nullify the curse. Hence a person in walking out of a sitting crowd will be most careful to avoid, if at all possible, stepping over the legs or feet of others. To place one's hand on the shoulder of another person while rising is also resented as an insult. The showing of the sole of the foot to a person is considered extremely rude, and to touch another with the sole of the foot is bitterly resented. For showing the sole of the feet when sitting before a great chief, people have been beaten, enslaved, and even killed. Visitors who have been sitting in a town must not brush the dust and dirt off their clothes until they get outside the town, as such an action is regarded as putting a curse on the town. Among adults, both men and women, reviling, abusing, cursing and swearing are very common—the women being especially glib with their tongues, and there is a wide vocabulary at their disposal. Among boys and girls the most common curse is, "Cry for mother," which means, "May your mother die and give you cause for mourning." I have seen small boys maddened by the repetition of such a curse, and in their rage they have rushed at boys twice their size in an attempt to fight them for uttering such things about their mother.



## CHAPTER XV

### A SECRET SOCIETY—COUNTRY-OF-THE-DEAD

THE *raison d'être* for the Congo secret societies is lost in the dim and distant past. It may be that they were started to hold in check some tyrannical chiefs who were oppressing the people, or to give mutual protection to their members from the exactions of an upstart class of nobles who wished to grind down the common people, or to afford their members mutual support against charges of witchcraft and the evil designs of witch-doctors, or to rid the country of witches, who were regarded as the cause of death, disease, and troubles; or it may be they were organised to render aid to their members in their travels about the country for trade and other purposes, like some of our present-day guilds in Europe. On the other hand, they may have originated from a desire to oppress rather than to resist oppression, from a wish to extort money from non-members, and to levy illegal tolls on trade caravans—as the *nkimba* guild used to do; or to gain an opportunity to satisfy lustful passions—which opportunity they certainly had in the *ndembo* society.

There was cohesion amongst the members of the various branches of a society; but not between the members of the different societies. Membership in one guild gave no privileges in another guild. The members of each society were called *nganga*, or “the knowing ones.” Sometimes there was a veneer of mystery spread over their actions, their languages, and their rites and ceremonies, and in some cases a good deal of fetish palaver. With their mysteries I do not think they deceived any but themselves, and, if the uninitiated natives accepted their statements and recognised their privileges, it was from fear and not from faith. The spread of missionary



teaching and education, and the opening up of the country by the influx of so many white men, have given a fatal death-thrust to these guilds, so that one seldom hears of them now, whereas twenty-five years ago they were a fruitful subject of conversation.

It is stated by some travellers that the *ndembo* and *nkimba* secret societies have to do with circumcision, or puberty rites; but after a careful investigation over a lengthy period, and many conversations with members of those guilds, I have not found that they have anything to do with either of them.

The first secret is known as either *ndembo*, or *nkita*, or *nsi a fwa*. *Ndembo* is probably a derivative of the verb *lamba*, which means to deliver from the influence of evil and from the spells of sorcery. It will be seen that those who enter *ndembo* do so to escape from an epidemic of sickness, or to cure themselves of some malformation, or disease, or to have their functions restored to a normal condition that will enable them to give birth to children. *Nkita* is a fetish that is responsible for all crooked and deformed things. Any abnormal event, such as a child being born by presenting its feet first, is put to the credit of *nkita*. *Nkita* is the power in the lodge that can remove deformities, and as infecundity is regarded as abnormal and a deformity, the sterile person, man or woman, has only to enter the *ndembo* lodge to have the disgrace removed. This is done by giving the initiated a new body. And the third name used for this society is *nsi a fwa*, and means the country-of-the-dead, because those who were initiated into it were supposed to die, and remain dead for a period varying from six months to three years.

The *ndembo* guild was very widespread throughout the Lower Congo, but I never met with it anywhere on the Upper River. To start a branch of this Society it was necessary to have an albino (or some hair of an albino), who, whether a child, lad, or an adult, was the acknowledged fetish head of it. Failing an albino then the hair of such was procured, and the part was supposed to have the magical powers of the whole, or,

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to state it, perhaps, more fairly, the presence of the albino's hair in the lodge was to the natives a guarantee that the magical, curative powers of the albino were really present. The doctors of the *nkau* order were at the head of the lodges belonging to this secret society.

The ostensible reason for starting a *ndembo* society in a district was an epidemic of sickness, and the idea was to go into the *ndembo* lodge to die and after an indefinite period to be resurrected with a new body not liable to the disease then troubling the country side. A dearth of children was also another cogent reason for starting a *ndembo* society; and it was believed that good luck in having children would attend those who entered and "died *ndembo*." But the underlying idea was the same, *i.e.* to get a "new body" that would be healthy and perform its functions in a normal manner.

The lodge (*vela*) was always located in a large, dense forest, and the entrance to it was a properly-made gate of planks painted yellow, blue, and red. The site selected was stockaded with palings to keep out intruders, and was within easy access of water. The uninitiated might walk on the public road across the forest, but if they were found on the bye-paths or hunting in the forest, they were caught, flogged, and heavily fined, and sometimes killed. The uninitiated were not allowed to look upon those who were said to "die *ndembo*," and therefore when the initiated were going about the forest outside the lodge, or were on their way to a neighbouring stream, a drum was beaten to keep the common folk away, and to warn off all possible Peeping Toms.

When the lodge was ready to receive those who desired to enter it, a witch-doctor (*nganga*) gave the sign, and the person to be initiated fell in some public place—such as a market or the centre of the town—and feigned death. A funeral cloth was then spread over him or her, and he was carried to the entrance (*mpanzu*) of the stockade, and the "doctors" themselves carried the novice into the lodge or collection of huts. The novice was then said to have "died *ndembo*." When the novice fell to the ground the "doctor" beat the earth round the "dead" with plantain stalks, chanted incanta-



*Photo by*

### THE NSAMBI

*Rev. F. Oldrieve*

This is the only musical instrument allowed in the "lodge" or the secret society of the Country-of-the-dead, when the supposed dead engage in their dances.



*Lent by*

### A CAT'S CRADLE

*Prof F. Starr*

Prof. Starr collected over sixty different designs in cats' cradles among the Congo tribes. The above is a Lower Congo one known as the Ghosts' beds.



tions, fired off guns, and danced about in a most fantastic fashion. This undoubtedly excited the emotionally inclined persons present, and one after another would fall in pretended death, and sometimes hysteria was induced that resulted in some falling into a true cataleptic state. Young people and adults of both sexes would drop, feigning death, to the number of 50, 60, 100, or more until the lodge was full. Those acquainted with the emotional, impressionable nature of the negro will have no difficulty in recalling similar instances of widespread hysteria at so-called revivals in the West Indies, and exhibited also in voodooism.

In the lodge the inhabitants were supposed to die, and their bodies to decompose until of each body only one bone remained, and of those particular bones the "doctors" had to take the greatest possible care. The people who had relatives in the lodge had to take a fair quantity of food every day or two to feed, so it was said, the "doctors" who turned the bodies as they decayed, and guarded the various bones after the flesh had rotted away. If the relatives had neglected to take food, but were members of a powerful family, *i.e.* a family able to avenge foul play, then their relative in the lodge had a special "resurrection" all to himself, or herself, and was returned to the town and specially instructed by the "doctor" in the things he should know, and the secrecy to be observed. If the neglected one, however, belonged to a small, weak family, he or she was taken away and sold in some distant market or town, and as a consequent fear of this possibility those having relatives in the *ndembo* lodge were very careful to contribute a fair share of food to the common stock.

"No cloths are worn in the lodge, for 'there is no shame in *ndembo*'; the bodies of the novices are rubbed with red ochre, arnatto red, or powdered camwood. Both sexes live together, and the grossest immoralities are practised; in this respect, however, some districts are worse than others, but the King of Kongo, long before missionaries went to his town, had prohibited the custom in and around San Salvador, as too vile to be permitted; and for the same reason it is not allowed in some other places.



"In the lodge an attempt is made to teach a secret language. The vocabulary is small, and very feeble in ingenuity. Some articles are called by fancy names, many being very simple in construction: the eye is called *nembweno*=the lord of sight; the ear *nengwila*=the lord of hearing. Many words are obscured by adding a prefix *ne* to them, with *lwa* at the end of the word: *nediambulwa*=*diambu*=a word, or palaver. A few fancy verbs are substituted for the commonest actions, as *yalala* for *kwenda*=to go,"<sup>1</sup> and so forth.

"*Kizengi* is the name for the language of the *ndembo* society. Where there is no special word the ordinary Congo word is preceded by the syllable *ne*, and when it is desired further to hide it *lwa* is added, e.g. *ke diambu ko mbazi tukwenda*, i.e. 'all right, we will go to-morrow,' appears thus: *ke nediambulwa ne ko ne kiayi kia nengundu yalala tukwenda ne ngyalala*."<sup>2</sup> Then follows a list of thirty or forty words and their meanings. I may say that during my investigations I have checked these observations of Dr. Bentley and found them correct.

If a person tried to run away from the lodge he (or she) was brought back and the escapade was forgiven once; but if he attempted it a second time he was taken away to some far-distant town by night and sold as a slave. A goatskin was put over the head of the unfortunate one, so that he might not be recognised if they had to pass a town or market during the day, or if they met his relatives on the road. The "doctors" gave out that the "ghosts" (*matombola*) had taken him away, and although they had searched the forest thoroughly they could not discover his body. When a person really died in the lodge his relatives were also told that the "ghosts" had stolen the person's body, or the bone that represented the body.<sup>3</sup>

When a woman was *enciente* before entering the lodge, or

<sup>1</sup> Bentley, *Pioneering on the Congo*, vol. i. p. 286; 1900.

<sup>2</sup> Bentley, *Appendix to the Dictionary and Grammar of the Congo Language*, 1895.

<sup>3</sup> My friend, Dr. Mercier Gamble, has two spikes that were used for driving up the nostrils of those who tried to escape from the lodge. This was resorted to when selling the runaway as a slave was too risky to attempt.

became so while in there, and eventually gave birth to a child, they could perceive the illogic of a "dead woman" giving birth to a baby, so to remove that difficulty they said, "The child broke through the stomach of the woman directly she 'died,'" and to prove their assertion they showed a large scar on the woman's stomach. This scar was made by putting some gunpowder on the stomach and exploding it. The burn gave a large cicatrix which lent colour to their story.

The life lived in the lodge by the men and women, and boys and girls, was a purely animal one, in which they gave full license to their lowest passions. Obscene dances were encouraged by the "doctors," and the sexes were allowed to mix as freely as their worst passions prompted. On account of the gross immoralities practised, these places at times excited the better class of people to rise against them and clear them out of their districts. I came across one lodge in 1883 about half a day's journey south of San Salvador. It was in a dense part of the forest, with a gaudily-painted entrance about 200 yards from the path.

As the fee for entering or "dying ndembo" was small, only one fowl per person, and on leaving 100 strings of blue beads (the fowl and beads were worth in all about three shillings), the advantages to the "doctors" for starting and running such a place are not at first apparent. A certain amount of trouble and outlay were necessary, at least in commencing a lodge. A few huts had to be built for the first batch of novices, even if the later arrivals built the rest. There was the stockade to erect, and the planks and pigments for the gateway to be paid for by some one. The "ndembo doctor" had to have subordinate "doctors" or assistants to help him in looking after the initiated, and to guard them from escaping, &c. I think the following are among some of the possible advantages accruing to the "doctor," the albino, and the assistants from instituting a ndembo lodge: the folk took good supplies of food to their relatives who had "died ndembo"; and the "doctor" and his helpers had the pick of the food for themselves, as they were the only ones who could go where the food was deposited. They had free quarters as

long as the lodge lasted, which might be six months or three years. The surplus food was sold on the market, and they shared the money. Any uninitiated persons caught near the stockade or on the bypaths of the forest were fined heavily; and any novices who repeatedly tried to escape were sold as slaves, and very probably others who did not try to get away were sold to enrich the "doctor" and his accomplices—it was so easy to say that the "ghosts" had taken such persons. Then, again, as the novices feigned death very often on the markets, and had on their best clothes and ornaments when they entered the lodge, and as they lived in nakedness in the lodge, and were supplied with new clothes by their friends when the time came for their "resurrection," their clothes and ornaments became the perquisites of the "doctor" and his assistants. Lastly, all those who had been under the "doctor" in the lodge most probably became his clients and called for his aid whenever they were sick, &c., after leaving the lodge, and in that way he built up a profitable business connection.

"*Ndembo*, under the spell of which they had passed, is considered to be a powerful fetish; twisted roots and singular distortions of plant life are the symbol of *ndembo*—hunch-back, club-foot, and other malformations, are attributed to *ndembo*. At times *ndembo* is spoken of as being something more than a fetish; it is said that he haunts certain woods as a demon, and I have been warned not to go into those woods, lest I too should suffer at the hands of the demon."<sup>1</sup>

Those initiated into this secret society receive new names, which they retain for life, for they are of a very complimentary character—implying fair, beautiful, light-skinned, &c. There are certain names peculiar to this society, and there are others that are never used. While living in the lodge a member may not be accused of witchcraft, nor is he supposed to be susceptible to the witchcraft of others. But when the members have left the lodge and are living in the town, they are in the same position as other people as regards witchcraft. This accords with the ordinary practice, that no absentee from a town can be charged with witchcraft.

<sup>1</sup> Bentley, *Pioneering on the Congo*, vol. i. p. 287.

As already stated, the duration of a lodge is very indefinite—from three or six months to two or three years. It must be remembered that the lodge is started to counteract an epidemic of sickness, and when the epidemic has passed away there is no longer any ostensible reason for its continuance, and therefore a day for the “resurrection” is fixed by the “doctor.” Again, the food supply may fall off for various reasons: the epidemic having passed, the folk refrain from taking food to the lodge, and thus they give a hint to the “doctor” to “resurrect” their relatives; or too many novices may be taken by the “ghosts,” and those outside stop the supplies and thus close the place; or the relatives of the novices may, after a few months, become weary of travelling long distances every day or two with heavy baskets of food and bunches of plantain, so the general supplies become indifferent and irregular, and the “doctor” takes the hint and appoints the “resurrection” day.

Parents and relatives pay the fee of 100 strings of beads each for those belonging to them in the lodge, and send fine clothes for them to wear, and camwood powder to redden their skins as a sign of beauty. It is announced well in advance that at a certain market, in the neighbourhood of the lodge, the initiates, now called knowing ones, will appear. The whole country-side assembles to witness the sight, to welcome and receive their relatives “back to life.” By and by the sound of music is heard, and the procession approaches; all the individuals in it are dressed in bright, showy clothes, skins well dusted with camwood powder, and with tassels of palm fibre dangling from their arms. The procession marches round the market-place with stolid, indifferent faces. In the crowd parents recognise their children in the procession, and boys and girls point out their sisters and brothers, and excitedly call out their names; but not a face in the procession lights up with recognition, not a muscle moves to express delight, for these “resurrected” ones are not supposed to know anything of their former life, or relatives and friends. Any one showing feeling or recognition is liable to a flogging, or a heavy fine, or in some cases even death. They have been well schooled for this hour, so the procession solemnly passes round the crowd.



There may be in the throng a mother or a sister, not seen perhaps for a year or more, but no sign must be made. Some scan the gathering for faces that are absent, for faces that will never appear again on the market-place, and the sorrow of death and bereavement pierces the heart of the initiated one in the procession, but no tear must fall, and no relaxation of the face be shown. At last the march round is finished, and the "doctors" introduce the "resurrected" ones to their relatives and friends.

Those who "die ndembo" are supposed not to know anything, or anybody they knew previous to their entrance into the lodge. They pretend not to know their parents, or their brothers and sisters, or their relatives, friends, and former acquaintances. Their mother tongue is new to them, and their town, houses, roads, &c. are all supposed to be wiped clean from their minds. The "doctors" introduce them to their parents, families, &c., tell them the names of the various people about them, show them about their towns, point out to them the various paths—"this one to the river where you get water, this to the forest, this to the farm, and these to the different markets," and so on; and they also teach them the names of the articles about the house and village, and their uses. A heavy punishment is laid upon those who in a careless, forgetful moment show that they know anything or anyone not brought to their notice by one of the "doctors." Sometimes the punishment is a severe beating, and at other times the fine of a fowl, or a goat, or a pig is inflicted, and even death threatened and, I believe, it has been actually visited upon those who by negligence divulged the secrets of the society.

After leaving the lodge the initiated are accompanied, for a time, by one of the "doctors." They demand gifts of the people they meet, want everything they see, act like children or lunatics, and try to seize the thing they desire, and, if it is refused, will attempt to beat or even kill the person who refuses them. If the "doctor" is with them he will stop them at once, not allowing them to go to extremes, for he is responsible for their actions while with them. If, however, the "doctor" is not with them the person attacked may defend himself with any weapon he has to hand. These initiated folk,

who have only recently left the lodge, are supposed to be children just "resurrected," not knowing any better. They are irresponsible, and not accountable for their actions. So well do they play their part that food has to be masticated for them, and they have to be fed like babies. This pretended irresponsibility opens the door for many abuses. Two or three of these *ndembo* folk may meet an unarmed, uninitiated person and rob him, giving a part of the proceeds of their robbery to the "doctor" for vanishing at the convenient moment. Quite recently I was speaking to a man who was thus attacked near San Salvador by two *ndembo* folk, but he was able to beat them off. The "doctor" demanded a fine from him for beating them, but he refused to pay it, and put in a counter-claim against the "doctor" because he was drinking in the town instead of looking after his people. He did not receive compensation, but neither did he hear any more about the fine.

After a short time the excitement of the "resurrection" and the interest in the resurrected ones passes away, and they are expected to know better, and are dealt with according to the laws of the district if they play any more tricks.

In the lodges drum and horn trumpets are not allowed, for it would be somewhat absurd to play such instruments to the "dead." But when the inmates of the lodges desire to dance, a comparatively quiet instrument called *nsambi* is used. It is harp-like in tone, and is played with a small piece of splinter. The accompanying sketch was made from a small one in my possession. The music would not be heard very far in the forest, but it served the purpose of giving time to the dancers. This musical instrument must never be seen by the uninitiated. The strings are called *minza*, and are made by scraping down the hard outer bark or casing of the palm tree. The player is named *nembimbi*. When any of the novices left the lodge for fetching firewood, water, &c. a drum was beaten to warn the uninitiated not to enter the forest, but the drum was never taken inside the stockade. In the Ngombe Lutete district the *ndembo* society goes by the name of *kimpasi*, and in the Zombo district east of San Salvador, there are many obscene things done as the procession marches round the market-place on the "resurrection" day.



## CHAPTER XVI

### A GUILD, BACHELOR'S CLUB, AND CIRCUMCISION

WHEN at Mpalabala, a town near Matadi, in 1889 I had my first sight of the *nkimba*—a secret society for males only. I then saw six of the brotherhood in their queer dress quite near to the house in which I was staying, and heard their strange trill mingled with yells, screams, and the rustling of their grass skirts. On one occasion I had to pay them black mail for permission to pass with my carriers. This I should not have done had not my carriers been returning by the same route a few days later without me, when they would have had to face alone the full vengeance of the guild, so for their sakes I submitted to be fleeced.

Dr. Bentley in his *Pioneering on the Congo*, vol. i. page 282, has the following account of the *nkimba* guild, which as it contains nearly all the information I have gathered, I transcribe in full. One or two other items of importance that I have gained deal with a mode of entrance to the lodge, and the “doctor” who presides over it. At the head of every lodge was a “doctor” of the *ebaku* order, who superintended the spinning of the novices who wished to be initiated into the *nkimba* mysteries. *Ebaku* means an old man, an elder, and it was his duty to look after the novices while they were in the lodge, and to teach them the arts of the guild, the way to make the peculiar trill of the guild, and the secret language. And when the novice was ready to enter the lodge, this “doctor” spun him round and round until he became giddy and fell unconscious to the ground, and in that state he was carried into the lodge. This was the most common method of stupefying

the candidate, and not by the administration of a drug, which was the exception. The "doctor" also taught his pupils how to make their skirts of palm frond or dried grass on the hoops.

To quote Dr. Bentley: "The *nkimba* custom appears to have been introduced from the coast in comparatively recent times, and spread up the Congo for some two hundred miles, and for some fifty miles south of it. Its professed object is the suppression of witchcraft, and the catching of witches. It resembles Freemasonry in many respects, and like its European cousin, delights in enshrouding itself in mystery.

"The initiatory fee is two dollars' worth of cloth and two fowls. This paid, the novice presents himself at a 'home' in the jungle away from the town. He is given a drug which stupefies him, and when he recovers consciousness he is in the 'home.' He finds his fellow *nkimba* wearing a crinoline of palm frondlets, and their bodies whitened with pipeclay. No one is allowed to speak the local dialect, a made-up language of their own being spoken; and the novice who ventures to speak anything else is soundly beaten. The secret language is fairly well developed; many of the words are modifications of Kongo words, others are very different. The grammatical rules of Kongo are very closely followed. A *nkimba* friend at Stanley Pool, finding that I knew some words, enabled me to complete a list of about 200. He was far from home, so he ventured to break the rule of the guild; had it been known, it would have cost him his life, for the secret is very closely kept. Five words and a sentence will suffice for an example of the character of the secret language.

ENGLISH.	KONGO.	NKIMBA.
A feather	<i>Lusala</i>	<i>Lusambwa</i>
To give	<i>Vana</i>	<i>Jana</i>
To go	<i>Kwenda</i>	<i>Diomva</i>
Animal fit for food	<i>Mbizi</i>	<i>Nkubuzi</i>
Maize	<i>Masa</i>	<i>Nzimvu</i> (perhaps from <i>ngemwo</i> = the beard of maize).

English. Fetch us some water to drink.

Kongo. *Bong' o maza twanua kweto.*

Nkimba. *Diabila ngolumwa tutefa kubwefo.*

“Only males are admitted to the guild. They live apart for a period varying from six months to two years, and in this time they thoroughly learn the secret language. They always wear their distinctive dress and paint; and in the daytime they wander in the woods and jungle, where they are supposed to dig for roots, and learn the botany of charms and spells. Sometimes they hang about the main roads and molest passengers, beating them with sticks; hence when their strange trill call is heard, everyone runs away and hides. They are much feared by the uninitiated, and in the early days of our transport they were a trouble to our carriers. If they catch any one, there must be no resistance to robbery, or a severe beating and heavy fine will be the result. At night they rush yelling about the town and neighbourhood, pretending to hunt for witches, and woe betide the common native caught outside his house. The simple people rejoice that there is such an active police against witches, maladies, and all misfortunes.

“When the period of initiation is over, the *nkimba* becomes a full brother (*mbwamvu anjata*), and returns to ordinary life. His brother *nkimbas* help him in trade, travel, and difficulties, and many advantages accrue to him. It is a clique which hangs well together; in this the guild is much like Freemasonry. So far so good; but there is another side to it: it is a gross imposition, and its effect is to bind a man more closely to superstition and heathen custom, any attack upon which is an attack upon his craft and guild. It is a good thing that it is now dying out, and that *nkimbas* are seldom seen in many parts where once they were common; but in old times the custom had its uses in checking the greed and violence of chiefs, and establishing a helpful brotherhood among a wild and wicked people. At the same time, the guild could become a tyranny, and in some places it sought to monopolise



*Photo by*

MEMBERS OF THE NKIMBA SECRET SOCIETY

These men pipe-clay the upper part of their bodies, and wear crinolines of grass and palm-bast suspended from ornamental belts worn round the waist. For full particulars, see Chapter XVI.

*M. Shau*





trade. The first opening up of the country seemed to spread the guild; but now that there is so much security in the land, it has become unnecessary, and is fast becoming obsolete. The *nkimba* mystery has nothing to do with circumcision, as some have said."

The following passage, also from Bentley's *Pioneering on the Congo*, vol. i. p. 451, is interesting as showing the widespread influence of the *nkimba* guild when it was in full force:

"The next day Messrs. Comber and Hartland went up to the Vunda towns on the hills. As they drew near, the natives came in force to attack them. Comber shouted to them to come and talk. Their only reply was 'Go away!' He told them he wanted to build on the headland; but they would not hear of it. 'Go away! go away!' was all that they would say. Comber did not like to take 'No' for an answer, and began to walk towards them. They spread out and prepared for a serious attack. Just as things began to be critical, a man of Manteke, who had been engaged by Comber, ran forward towards the people. He was a *nkimba*, and uttered the strange trill of the guild. Guns were lowered, and they gathered round him, for more than half the warriors were brother *nkimbas*. By the *nkimba's* influence hostilities at once ceased, and the natives, on finding that the white men could talk their language and wished to do them no harm, gave permission for the building of the station on the site desired by the missionaries."

The *nzo a mbongi*, or *nzo a toko*, was a house for lads and unmarried men, or bachelor's club. Boys, on reaching the age of twelve, had to live in such a house, whether circumcised or not, and, if uncircumcised, had to take the next opportunity of submitting to the rite. The small boys fagged for the big ones, fetching firewood and water and keeping the place clean. If they refused to do this work, their faces were tied up, and they were not allowed to sit near the fire, or to join in the talk of the others. The boys were permitted to hold conversation with their mothers, sisters, and families, but, on receiving their share of the family food, they had to take it

to the men's house and eat it there. Boys went from these houses to the circumcision lodge, and returned after the lodge was broken up at the end of the season. There was no special teaching beyond listening to the talk of the older, unmarried men. The boys had not to reveal what they saw there. Unbetrothed girls visited the house in the dark by arrangement with the young men, but were not allowed to talk about the secrets of the place. Many of those who lived in the house did not know who came and went in the dark. The unbetrothed girls from an early age up to puberty had free ingress to these houses at night, and their parents encouraged them to go, as it "showed they had proper desires, and later in life they would bear children." Thirty years ago such club-houses were to be found in all the large villages, but since the spread of Christianity they have passed away. Not only have Christian parents set their faces against the continuance of these bachelor clubs as a part of their village life; but heathen parents also helped to put them down, for they noticed that as monogamy displaced polygamy the man who could only marry one wife desired her to be as pure as he could obtain her, and the girls belonging to villages where such club-houses existed were at a discount and were left unsought in marriage.

There are two modes of circumcision followed—that in vogue around San Salvador, and that observed by the people in and around Ngombe Lutete. It may be that there are various other modifications in other districts. We will describe the San Salvador customs first.

A large house or lodge (*vela*) is built in the centre of the group of towns from which the boys are to come upon whom the rite is to be performed. It is built by the men of the district on some exposed hill, separated from any one town, but not far from a stream. When all is ready, the lads are received by the "doctor," who is a recognised member of the *eseka*, or *lubwiku* order. If the former the lodge is called *eseka* (probably from *seka*=to sharpen), and, if the latter, it is called *lubwiku*. Both establishments may be running in the same neighbourhood simultaneously, and the number of lads who go

to either place depends on the fame and popularity of the "doctor" practising there. The time for performing the rite is the cold season—May to October. The boys while in the lodge are supplied with food by their mothers and relatives, and the "doctor" and his assistants maintain themselves out of the provisions taken to the lads; thus he and his people have free quarters for five months. The fee paid for the operation is five strings of blue pipe beads for each boy, costing in London twopence, but worth about sixpence in San Salvador.

Should any lads be unwilling to go, they are taken by force and carried to the lodge by their relatives, but such force is rarely necessary, as most of the lads willingly submit themselves to the rite, and those that are not very willing to bear the pain are laughed into submission by the jeers of their companions. On being circumcised every boy has a new name given to him, which they can retain after they leave the lodge if they so desire. Some admire their new names so much that they keep them, while others, who receive what they consider to be ugly names, relinquish them directly they leave the lodge. One boy is told off to look after the fire and to take care that it never goes out. The foreskins are simply buried, and the wounds are washed daily. There are certain restrictions placed upon the lads, for they are not allowed to see their mothers, sisters, or any women and girls during the months they are in the lodge. The fire must never go out, and there must not be any fights, rows, or quarrels between them while in the lodge. Neither guns nor knives are permitted in the lodge, and all charms and fetishes must be left outside.

Should the fire go out the mother of the boy who had the care of it has to pay a fine of one fowl; and anyone who takes a knife, a gun, or a charm into the lodges renders his mother liable to the same fine. When the penalty is incurred, and is not forthcoming at once, the "doctor" and the lads living in the lodge go between 11 and 12 o'clock one night and sit outside the mother's or relative's house, and drum and sing until the fine is paid. But, if after four or five hours of drumming and chanting the fine is not brought to the "doctor,"

he threatens to break up the lodge, and leave all the lads on the offender's hands, to attend to their wounds, &c. This threat, however, is always effective.

Should any of the boys in the lodge fight among themselves, their punishment is to sit in the stream during the night. The "doctor," the assistants, and the lads sit on the bank singing and drumming, and the shivering lads in the water have to take up the chorus. Sometimes the quarrelsome boys are led to the top of a bleak hill, and being stripped, they are made to lie in a nude condition on the cold, damp ground. The nights during the cold season are extremely chilly and the dews are very heavy, and there is no doubt that some boys have died, and others have suffered all their lives, as the result of these stupid punishments.

Boys enter the lodge at different times during the season, but all leave together; and when the time arrives for abandoning it, quite a fair is held. Parents and friends come from all the surrounding villages, decked in their best clothes and ornaments, to welcome back their sons to home and village life. Guns are fired, trumpets blown, and drums beaten, and singing and dancing are well in evidence on these festive occasions.

About the *eseka* "doctor" there is no fetish idea associated—with him it is a simple, surgical operation; but about the *elongo*, *kumbi*, and *lubwiku* "doctors" there is much fetish ceremony, and powerful fetishes are supposed to help them in their operations. For example, when the *lubwiku* lodge is burnt down at the end of the season the "doctor" is tied to the centre post of the house, but by the aid of his strong fetishes he escapes unhurt from the burning house. The only reason I have ever had given me for practising this rite, is that the women prefer those men who have observed it, and will not marry those who are uncircumcised. In some districts a man who has not submitted to this ceremony is not allowed to sit down with other men, hence the practice is universal in those places.

Around Ngombe Lutete, which is due north of San Salvador, the practice is by no means general. The operation is some-

times performed two or three weeks after birth, sometimes at the age of ten or twelve, and in other cases even at the age of twenty. The *kumbi* doctor performs the operation, and charges each boy two brass rods. While the lad is undergoing it, he must not be seen by the women, and when circumcised, he must not, for a certain time, go into the kitchen or place where the women do their cooking, *i.e.* he must not associate with women and girls. When the operation is over, the boy digs a hole about eighteen inches in diameter, and about the same in depth. He then procures some large, hard-skin beans, and makes them very hot in the fire; these are put into the hole, and the boy lies across the hole above the hot beans, and is steamed for some time, after which he goes off to wash in a stream. Some grass stems are then burnt, and the ashes rubbed on the wound, and he thereupon enters his house and waits until he is well, when he puts on a new cloth and the affair is finished.

In the Zombo country, east of San Salvador, the ceremonies and restrictions observed are very similar to those around the King's capital of San Salvador, with these modifications, that the Zombo lads live in the lodge for a year or more; they observe many fetish ceremonies, and are not allowed to speak to anyone, or to eat anything outside the lodge, during the whole time; there is much dancing, and the nights are made hideous with wild music; and on special occasions they put on masks of various shapes, and go dancing, into the towns and market-places, and ask for money of the women, who, when they find the yelling, screaming, grotesque figures gesticulating about them, are frightened into satisfying their demands.

I find that some operation is also performed on girls, but my informants cannot tell me what it is, as it is a well-preserved secret between the *kumbi* "doctors" and the girls. All they can tell is that the house is built on a platform, as the girls are not permitted to touch the ground, and in this house the girls live, sing, and dance for some three or four months. The *kumbi* "doctor" visits them occasionally to instruct them in marital matters; and they are attended to by the women of the village. The girls think, and are taught by their mothers



and the women generally to believe, that unless they undergo this operation or ceremony they will have no children.

In the books of old travellers, who have written on the Lower Congo, one often comes across the phrase *casa de tinta*, or *nzo a tinta*, i.e. house of paint, and they refer to the vile customs and immoralities practised in these "paint houses." It is probable that these writers refer either to the *ndembo* lodge, the gateway to which is very gaudily painted, or to the *kumbi* house where the girls go, and where they daub themselves with red camwood powder. Their description of the vile practices pursued in the "paint house" would well fit either the one or the other; but I am rather inclined to think, for several reasons, that they had the *kumbi* house in their minds when they wrote.

Around San Salvador, in the area that is influenced by the court of the King of Kongo, and throughout which he exercises his power as overlord, it is very noticeable that the ceremonies relating to the *ndembo* secret society, and to the rites of circumcision, are more elaborate than in the districts far removed from the court. It may be that in the old days the same elaboration was to be found throughout the whole Kingdom of Kongo; but as the area of the King's effective rule shrunk, the ritual became more lax, until now, in those parts where the King is only a shadow without substance, and a name without force, only a few shreds of ceremony remain. Or the reason for this difference may be that where the King, or some great chief, exercises a strong overlordship there is more cohesion among the people and a greater sense of security, hence in the San Salvador and Zombo districts it is possible to have a joint lodge with its restrictions, rules, and ceremonies, for a large area; whereas in the Ngombe Lutete district, where the people are broken up into very small groups under petty chiefs, there are no common lodges for the candidates of circumcision.

In relation to this overlordship of the King of Kongo, it is worthy of note that the *nkimba* guild was ineffective in the San Salvador districts, for the King levied a toll on all caravans passing through his dominion, and in return he protected them

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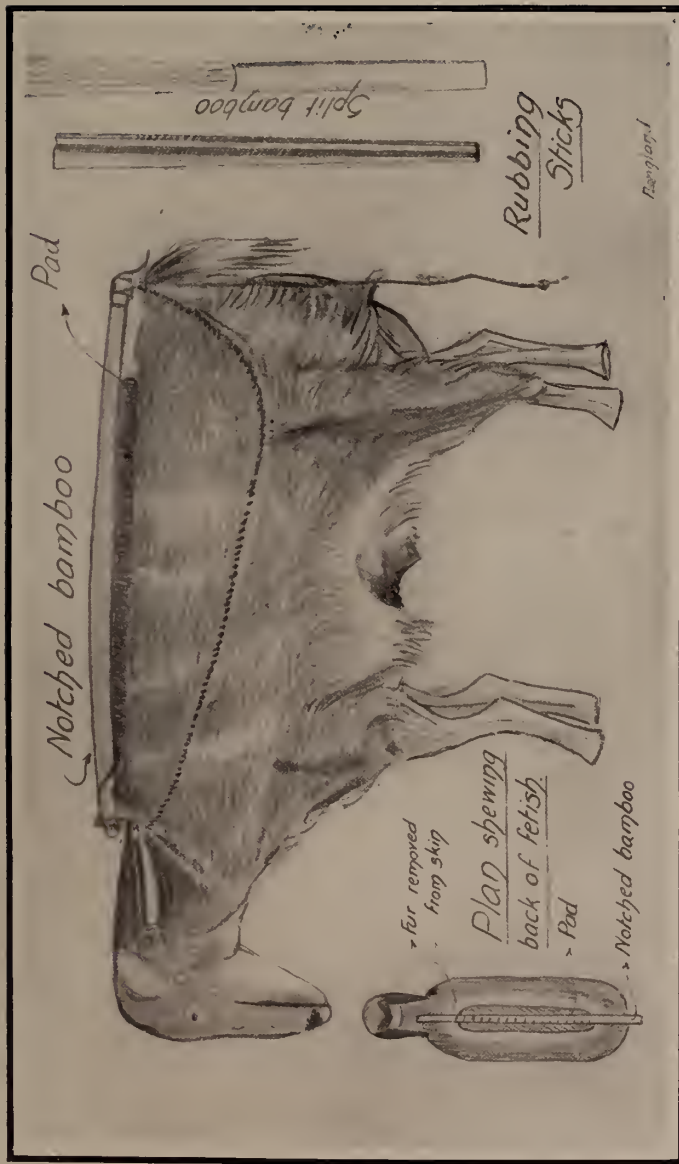
from being fleeced by others in that area; hence the *nkimba* guild never gained ground around San Salvador, but was powerful in those districts where small chiefs were always bickering and fighting each other. I would suggest that elaborate ceremonies in primitive secret societies, witchcraft palavers, &c., are either the result of, or in response to, an elaborate court ceremony; and that for their continuance there must be a certain amount of security and cohesion among the people. Is it not possible that the fluctuations in the peace and cohesion of a tribe have affected considerably their customs and modified the ceremonies with which they are observed, and that the institutions of primitive peoples for these reasons have not that permanency with which they are often credited?

## CHAPTER XVII

### BUSH BURNING AND HUNTING

BY August, towards the end of the long rainless season, the tall jungle grass is dry and ready to burn; and it is during this time of grass burning that one form of hunting is pursued throughout the Lower Congo. It is most probable that their method of combining hunting with bush burning accounts for the comparative scarcity of large game throughout this part of Africa. When one recalls the descriptions of those who have hunted in South Africa, we are inclined to say that *this part* of West Africa is lacking in animal life, yet such an assertion would not be quite accurate. I have travelled on foot over 2,000 miles up and down the Lower Congo, and I have seen only one antelope, and the footmarks of a few elephants; and the native hunters I have known have not been very successful, considering the amount of energy and time they have devoted to the pursuit of game. On the other hand, I have heard occasionally of herds of elephants, and rumours of herds of buffaloes have reached my ears, and the natives have the names for bush pigs and many species of antelopes; but notwithstanding all this I should not recommend the Lower Congo to a keen sportsman, for the guns of the natives and the periodical bush burning have, at least, made the animals exceedingly shy, if not scarce.

When the custom of bush burning first commenced, will probably never be known; but there are evidences that the annual bush fires have been in vogue for several generations, for when I arrived on the Congo in 1882, it was a thoroughly and properly organised affair with its rules and laws well recognised throughout the country for regulating it. The rainy season is from the middle of October to the middle of May—



*Drawing by*

# A HUNTING FETISH DRUM

*Rev. F. Longland*

This drum was used in making "medicine" at the beginning of the hunting season. The body of the "antelope" is hollow, and forms the drum. The solid stick gives a deep note, and the split one sharp rattling notes, when rubbed along the back. The original is in the British Museum.





a few days more or less. There is a short dry season in January and the torrential downpours are in March and April. December is the hottest month in the year, the temperature often being  $105^{\circ}$  in the shade; and June is the coldest month in the whole twelve, the thermometer frequently showing  $65^{\circ}$  in the shade. During a storm the temperature sometimes falls 20 or 25 degrees in less than two hours.

The whole of the land is owned by one or other of the chiefs, and the boundary of one chief's property is the beginning of the next chief's estate. Streams are good lines of demarcation, and when these are absent, or not convenient, then gashes are cut in the paths to mark off the confines of one chief's land from another. Forests are the common property of those chiefs whose boundaries touch them, and in those forests such chiefs and their peoples have rights of hunting, the gathering of firewood, and the felling of timber for house building.

Each chief suits his own convenience for firing the grass belonging to him; but if there is a possibility of his grass setting fire to the bush belonging to another chief, then the natives of both towns meet and agree on a day for burning those stretches of bush land which are contiguous to each other. To disregard this law is to court a war in which the offending party, being entirely in the wrong, will lack the sympathy of the neighbouring chiefs.

When the time for grass burning draws near the people select a morning when the vegetation is limp with heavy dew; and they break and push down the grass all round the town for one or two hundred yards, taking care to bend the grass so that the stalks point outward from the houses. Another suitable morning is chosen, and then this belt of broken-down grass is carefully fired. The men have branches to control and, if necessary, to beat out the flames should the adjacent unbroken grass catch fire. This belt round the town having been burnt, the people feel that their homes are secure from the onrush of the flames when the time comes for firing the bush.

The grass-burning season is a great time for the people

## 180 METHOD OF GRASS BURNING

The men clean, oil, and load their guns, the lads procure knives, the boys cut heavy sticks and borrow spare hoes, and even the girls and women are all excitement in anticipation of the various species of rats they will capture in their holes. The grass is anything from six to fifteen feet high, and many of the stalks are as thick as one's fingers; and as there has been no rain since the middle of May, the grass is withered, and dry, and when the sun has licked off the dews, it is as ready to take fire as tinder.

One morning when the wind is blowing from the town, the hunters take their places along the sides of the strip of bush to be burnt. The grass is fired, and any animals—antelopes, wild pigs, buffaloes, or palm rats—that may be concealed in the tall grass run helter-skelter from the rushing, crackling flames, and as they pass near the hunters they are fired at by them. Fish-eagles, kites, and hawks circle above the flames to pounce upon any snakes, rats, or lizards that are driven from their hiding-places; and before the ground has time to cool again, after the fire has passed, the women, girls, and boys are swarming over it hunting for rat-holes, so that they may dig them out, and feast on these much-prized delicacies.

During the grass-burning season the air is filled with smoke; you taste smoke, smell smoke, breathe smoke, and the eyes often smart with smoke. The smoke ascends in great clouds, and hanging like a pall, it hides the sun for days, and gives the sky a dull, monotonous appearance that wearies and irritates you. Sometimes for two or three days there is no wind to stir the murky air, and it becomes heavy and vitiated, and you long for a stinging tornado or a torrent of rain to purify the nauseous atmosphere. When there is a slight breeze, and it blows from the direction of the fire across your station, it comes laden with charred pieces of grass, which are carried into your house through the doors, windows, and ventilators, and the housewife finds her furniture quickly covered with burnt grass. At night it is a grand sight to see the hills in the distance outlined in living flames; and when the thick grasses are burning they generate such an amount of steam in their stalks that causes them to explode with loud, gun-like reports, and the force of

the explosions sends the burning grass hurrying through the night air like flaming rockets. More than once I have had to put lads on the grass roofs of our houses, to throw off, or stamp out, the burning grass as it fell on them. This season is always an anxious time where there are grass roofs, for the wind may veer at any moment, and the sparks that were falling harmlessly in the bush far away on the other side of the fire, may be swung round and dropped on the place containing your household treasures, and destroy all that you have of home in the great wilderness.<sup>1</sup>

Hunting proper (called *veta* in some districts and *wela* in others) begins in September and ends in November. During these months the grass is short, because by the end of August the old, tall grass has been burnt to the ground, and the new grass has not reached any height. At the beginning of the hunting season the hunters call a medicine-man (*ngang' a nkongo*), who possesses a hunting fetish, for him to make a suitable charm which will give them good luck in killing all kinds of game; and the charm he then supplies is supposed to be effective for a whole year. For the making of the proper charm the "doctor" needs various ingredients, such as a piece of camwood, some special leaves, the new sprouts of the *nianga* grass, some parrot's feathers, a few cowrie shells, a little wood ash, the foreleg of a bat, some red peppers, and some small shot. He cuts all these up in small pieces, and having thoroughly mixed them, he fills some small antelopes' horns with the strange compound, and securing their ends with rubber he hands one to each hunter.

When a famous hunter dies, the natives are very careful to mark the position of his grave; and to ensure its being properly remembered, the hair of the renowned man is cut off and buried near the grave with a large stone on top to indicate the position. When such a hunter is lying on his deathbed a thread is drawn from his native-made cloth (*mbadi*, made from palm fibre), and tied round the forehead or arms of a young man chosen for the purpose, who from that time is

<sup>1</sup> We had one station burnt to the ground by one of these bush fires in the early history of our mission.

known as the advocate (*kimpovele*=the one who speaks to another on behalf of someone else). This "advocate" may marry only one wife, whom he must never beat or he will lose his power; but should he want more than one woman, the extra ones are called "lovers" (*makangu*), and never wives (*nkaza*). This may be a survival of a Portuguese Catholic idea that a certain amount of holiness was required for the proper exercise of a priest's functions.

When the hunters have finished making their charms they next visit the grave of a great hunter. There was one such grave just outside San Salvador, and I often saw them at this ceremony, and rumours of their success in hunting sometimes came to me. The "advocate" goes first and kneels with his face towards the hunters, and his back to the grave. The hunters then approach him slowly, stopping every few steps to clap their hands; and on reaching the kneeling advocate, they spread themselves out and dance round the grave to the "rub, rub" of the antelope drum (see plate, page 178). They have brought with them a calabash of palm wine, which they place on the ground and their guns alongside. The "advocate" then turns towards the grave, and, shaking his rattle, he prays thus: "You are blind but your ears are not deaf. Oh ears, hear well! we have come to you, we come kneeling. While you lived in the town, you ate and you drank, now we who are left die of hunger; give us male and female animals."<sup>1</sup>

A man then raises the calabash of palm wine to his shoulder, and the "advocate," standing in front of him, makes the sign of the cross, and then taking a cup of the wine he pours it out on the grave as an oblation to the renowned hunter to whom he has prayed. The remainder of the wine is drunk by the hunters sitting in a circle round the grave. When the palm wine is finished the "advocate" rubs a little of the earth moistened with the oblatory wine on the forehead and temples of each hunter to give them cunning in tracking the animals; on the forearms and wrists to give steadiness of aim; on the

<sup>1</sup> In the native language the words are as follows: *Wafwa kia meso, kwafwa kia matu ko, o matu nkelo! Twizidi ku lumbu, twizidi kufukamena, ova wakala oku 'vata, dia wadidenge, nua wanunwenenge, owau twasala fwa langala; se utukuyila nkento ye mbakala.*



knees and insteps to give them swiftness in chasing their game. After giving these magical powers to the hunters he takes each gun and rubs across the butt, and draws his fingers up the butt, and, on reaching the barrel, he snaps his fingers, and hands the charmed gun to its owner, who on taking it claps his hands, jumps in the air, and, holding the gun in front of him, he walks backwards a little, facing the grave, and sits down and waits for the others. When all have been through this ceremony they fire a salute, sing in praise of the deceased hunter, rub the antelope drum, and drink more palm wine. These hunters from this time until they kill an animal must abstain from all intercourse with women, or the magic will not work.

When they go hunting they either take their horns of "medicine" with them, each carrying his own under his belt, or they wet the rubber stopper and rub the butt of their guns with a little of the moisture. When a party of hunters has been successful in killing an antelope the blood is caught in the animal's bladder and carried to the "advocate," who brings out of his house a cross, such as is shown, page 189, and sticks it in the ground near the great hunter's grave at which the ceremonies above described were observed. The blood is poured over the cross as an oblation to the deceased hunter who has heard their request and given them such success. The little hole in the middle of the cross is called the "heart," and in it the successful bullet is put, and the hole filled with blood. The cross is always well cared for in the house of the "advocate"; and he also has charge of the "antelope" drum<sup>1</sup> used for making the hunting charm at the beginning of the season. The body of the "antelope" is hollow, and forms the drum. The skin, which is that of the harness antelope, is tightly drawn over the drum, and the hair is removed from the skin along the opening in the back of the figure, making it vibrate more easily when the notched bamboo is rubbed by either stick. The solid stick gives a deep note when rubbed hard along the back, and the split bamboo gives sharp, rattling notes. The knees in the original animal drum are, as shown in the plate,

<sup>1</sup> A drum of this description the writer brought from Congo, and it is now in the British Museum.



at the back of the front legs instead of in the front—a mistake of the native workman. Such a drum is always a part of the “advocate’s” outfit.

Having poured the blood over the cross placed near the grave, the hunters repeat the following words: “We thank you for sending us such a fine animal, and hope you will repeat the favour.” *Only the blood of antelopes* is offered in this manner. Some of the blood is rubbed on their fetish charms, and the end of the tail is stuck in the wall, over the doorway of the house belonging to the fortunate hunter. We shall see later the reason for thus taking care of this part of the animal.

The man who fires first at an antelope as it rushes past, looks to see if any blood has fallen, or any hairs. If there is no sign of blood or hairs, then he has not killed it, although he may have mortally wounded it; if, when the next man fires, the animal drops it belongs to him. Should there be any dispute as to whether the animal was killed by the first shot or the second, the one who is positive and overrides all argument must take the heart of the antelope and eat it (not raw); then if his shot really killed the animal all is well, but, if not, the eating of the heart will destroy his hunting skill (=his *kinkongo*). Many a man has relinquished his claim to an animal for fear of thus spoiling his luck. If two or more men fire simultaneously at an animal and kill it, they divide the flesh between them and give the heart to the dogs. At San Salvador the hunter eats the heart of the animal he is sure he has killed, but in the Ngombe Lutete district the heart is given to the hunter’s father.

If the man who ate the heart of the antelope whose death-shot he disputed with another hunter becomes unsuccessful in his next ventures, he takes a fowl to the other man who claimed to have killed the animal, and gives it to him, and that is called “paying back the heart.” It is really a tacit acknowledgment that the other man shot it; and on giving the fowl, the skill or luck is supposed to return. In the district where the heart is given to the hunter’s father, if afterwards he becomes a bad shot, he tells his father of his lack of success, and the father chews some red camwood, and expectorates the blood-coloured

saliva, and that is regarded as "giving back the heart," and the hunter thus regains his luck.

When an antelope is killed, the hunters spread some grass on the ground and the animal is laid on it. The successful hunter puts the butt of his gun to his shoulder, and the muzzle on the carcass, thus signifying his right to it. A cross-cut is made on the stomach of the animal, and the hunter puts his fingers three times in the blood and to his upper lip, then another three times, and rubs some blood on his gun each time. The antelope is removed, and the hunter, putting his gun under the grass, turns it over. The animal must not be divided until this rite is performed, or the hunter will lose his skill. The animal is thus divided: the kidneys and the pieces from along each side of the backbone are given to the chief of the town; one hind leg is given to the men left in the town, and they share their portions with their wives; one shoulder is divided among the hunters; the heart is given to the father of the successful hunter, if it is the custom of the district to do so; and the rest belongs to the man who killed it. If, however, the animal has been slain on land belonging to another chief, *i.e.* not on ground owned by the hunters' chief, then one leg is given to him in recognition of his rights over that part of the country. When an "advocate" kills an antelope he must give the loins to his wife, otherwise he will lose his power of imparting good luck to those hunters who seek his help.

It sometimes happens that a hunter has a run of very bad luck, and misses every animal that crosses his path. He may have "paid back a heart" and is still unsuccessful; he at last goes to a medicine-man (*ngang' a nkongo*), who makes three plaits of nine pieces of grass in each plait. He then asks for a piece of the last bird or animal his client killed. A man always keeps a feather or a claw of the last bird he shot, or the tail or hoof of the last animal he killed; and that is why these various odds and ends are stuck in the front wall of his house. At any time he may repeatedly miss his game, and need a bit of the last thing he shot to restore his luck. So we will suppose that our unsuccessful hunter, who desires to regain his luck, takes a claw of a hawk to the "doctor" as a

part of the last trophy of his gun. The "doctor" puts the claw on the ground and arranges three heaps of loose gunpowder round it, and chalks a cross near the powder and on the butt of the hunter's gun. The "doctor" then explodes the powder; and putting a little gunpowder into the gun, he hands it to the hunter, who standing a few feet away fires at the claw, and if it is blown away then his hunting skill has returned to him. The "doctor" takes the gun, and putting his finger in the dirt where the claw was, he rubs a little of the earth three times on the hunter's lips, and the fourth time he runs his fingers up the gun and snaps them. He now loosens the plaits of grass and shakes them about the gun that it may fire properly through the grass. The hunter claps his hands, takes his gun, and jumping in the air, he goes his way after paying his fee.

During the hunting season gun accidents are very common. A man hears a rustle in the grass, and thinking it is an animal, fires, and finds when too late that he has severely wounded a fellow-hunter. At one time death or slavery was the punishment for such an accident; but now the firer of the gun is mulct in a very heavy fine. The punishments meted out for such injuries have always depended largely on the importance of the person wounded, and the position of the one responsible for the accident. The guns often burst, from the excessive amount of powder used, causing considerable damage to the firer; and in fact, scarcely a hunting season passes without some cases coming to one or other of our hospitals. Loaded guns are sometimes placed near the tracks of animals, so that when the animal passes it touches a string and shoots itself. The one who fixes the gun in such a position should give full particulars to all concerned, and although this is done, yet accidents happen and legs are badly wounded with slugs—often bits of twisted brass wire, which poison the wounds and cause great mischief. Such casualties have caused many big palavers, and feuds between families that have lasted many a year.

There is a special medicine-man (*ngang' a ngani*) for the dogs, so as to make them good hunters. The Congo breed of dogs is exceedingly poor, for no new blood was introduced for generations, and thus their curs deteriorated

through constant inter-breeding in a very limited area. The Congo dogs have short hair, stand up-ears, long noses, and are very cowardly. When a man wants his dog to love and follow him, he washes his feet and armpits in water, and gives the water to the dog to drink, and then, it is said, it will track him anywhere and for any distance. But when a man desires that his dog should be a good hunter, he calls the above-mentioned "doctor," who takes some chalk, the head of a viper, various leaves, and mint, which he mixes and makes into a bundle. A small portion of this he puts into a leaf twisted into a funnel, and catching a wasp, he presses its juice into the funnel, and putting in a little palm wine, he squeezes the moisture from this mixture into the dog's nose, and behold, it is a good hunter and tracker of animals. Wooden bells are tied round the necks of dogs while hunting, that the hunters may know of their whereabouts in the bush, and not fire at them in mistake for game.

The following incident, which occurred in the Ngombe Lutete district in May 1908, well illustrates their superstitions regarding dogs. A good hunting dog was missing, and after two days' search it was found dead in the bush, and was at once buried. A day or so after the men went hunting, but their dogs seemed spiritless, indifferent in their search for game, and not at all keen of scent (the grass is very high and the bush thick at this season); so the hunters thought that the spirit of the dead dog was affecting the living dogs, because they had buried it with so little ceremony, and the only way to increase the interest of the living dogs in their work was to appease and comfort the spirit of the dead dog that they had buried so unceremoniously. The hunters went and surrounded the deceased dog's grave, and solemnly fired volley after volley until they considered that they had propitiated the dead dog's spirit. The usual mode, however, of burying a good hunting dog, is to wrap it in the skin of an antelope it has killed, and inter it at a cross road, and not in the bush.

During the few weeks that the grass remains short, the village boys go farm-rat hunting—these farm-rats are pretty little brown creatures with black stripes. They live on nuts

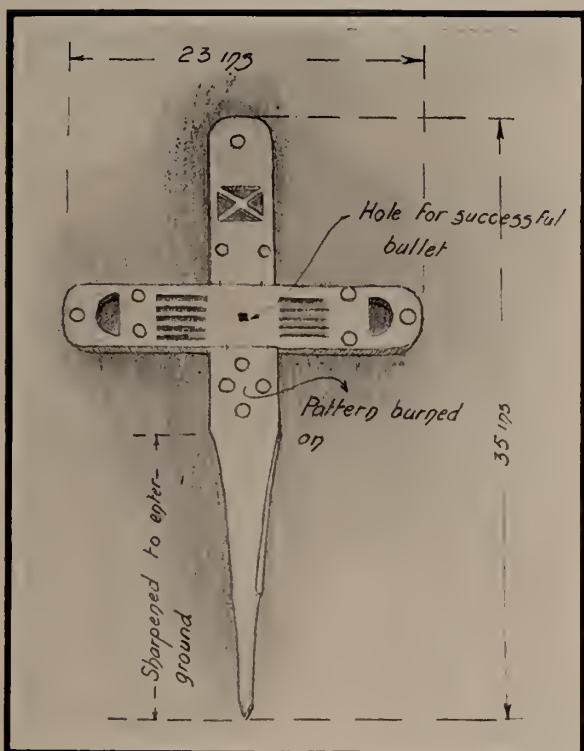


and roots, and their flesh is delicious, as I know from experience. My boys often during this season came from the farms with a dozen or twenty of these farm-rats apiece in their baskets; and being very short of food, they persuaded me to try some. Their habits are clean and their food wholesome, but their name and looks prejudiced me against them; that repugnance, however, once overcome, I am afraid that the boys at times regretted their powers of persuasion, for I often had a meal from their catch. The same may be said for a species of mole-rat, and the large palm-rat—they are good eating. No self-respecting boy would eat the dirty, common house-rat. They often told me that the lazy boys who did eat them got a scalp disease that affected the growth of the hair on the head, causing the hair to become tufty, like a badly-kept lawn, *i.e.* with little tufts of hair, and the scalp showing between; and certainly I knew one boy who ate house-rats and had a head of hair of that description.

Several boys with their miniature bows and arrows, and their small conical traps, would go together to the farms, and, finding the rat tracks, they would place their traps in them. Then making a wide detour, they would enclose a large space of an acre or two, and walk in, kicking the grass and shouting. The startled rats would make for their runs; but these little creatures have a way of running and stopping for a moment, and this habit is so well known by the boys that they walk in with their arrows fitted to their bows ready to fire, and directly a rat pauses, a dozen or more arrows are let loose at it, and the owner of that arrow which pierces a vital part claims the spoil. Should the rat escape the arrows, it darts along its track into the basket trap, which is built after the manner of the toy known as a Siamese link, and if the rat once enters it, the more it struggles the firmer it is held.

The boys make a fetish from pieces of wood about three inches long, to bring them good luck in rat and squirrel hunting. Such a charm is called *nambwa*. A boy takes from three to six pieces of wood of exactly the same length, and cuts notches in them which must correspond. These he hangs by a string round his neck, or at his girdle; and he pours a



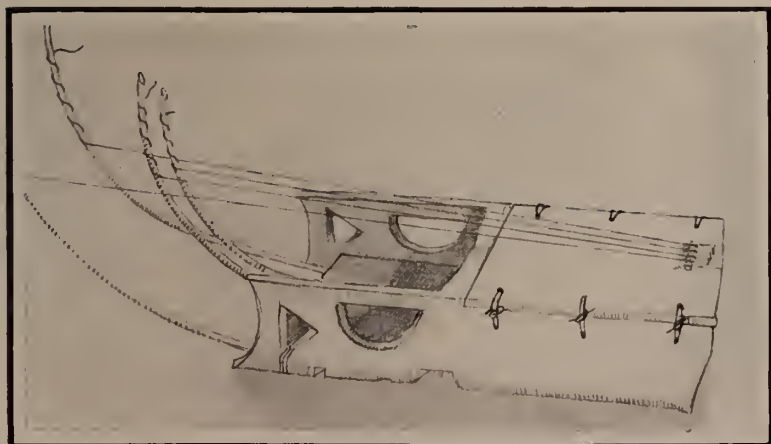


*Drawing by*

*Rev. F. Long and*

### FETISH CROSS USED IN HUNTING

When an antelope has been killed, the fatal bullet is put in the hole as shown, and blood is poured over it as an offering. The original is in the British Museum.



*Drawing by*

*Rev. F. Longland*

### THE NSAMBI

The only instrument allowed in the secret society's "lodge" to which the initiated may dance. It is a hollow case laced together with stout canes to draw the strings taut. The strings are made by scraping strips of palm bark to the required thinness.



little of the blood of every rat and squirrel he kills on to this *nambwa* charm as a thank-offering for his success.

Leopards are regarded with great respect, for they work considerable havoc among the goats and sheep, and they are not averse to visiting the fowl-houses and levying a heavy toll. People also are taken by them, hence there is much jubilation when a leopard is killed. The fortunate hunter has it carried through the towns of his district, and the principal chiefs give him presents as a recognition of his bravery—each trying, according to his wealth, to outvie the others in generosity. When it is known which chief has made the largest gift to the lucky hunter, that chief goes and puts his foot on the leopard, and thus establishes a claim to its skin, and this act is greeted with much firing of guns, beating of drums, and dancing round the prostrate beast. Until this ceremony of treading on the animal has been observed it cannot be skinned. The leopard after it is slain is always spoken of as “lord,” “chief” (*mfumu*).

After the skinned carcass has been returned to the hunter's town, two or three days are spent in festivities, accompanied with gun firing, drum beating, and the chanting of songs, in honour of the “slayer of the chief” (*mvondi a mfumu*); and much palm wine is drunk. The carcass is eaten by those who care to feast upon it; but many abstain from eating it, for fear of having spots come out on their skins similar to leopard spots. To take or sell a leopard skin outside the district in which it is killed would be resented as an insult and cause a fight.

While I was in the Ngombe Lutete district in 1908 a leopard was killed, and the carcass was carried to the old and real chief of the district (*Mpiodi* of *Nkondi*), who gave the hunter the largest donation, viz. 60 francs in silver; another chief gave one tin of gunpowder and two European rugs, worth in all 22 francs; another gave 15 francs, and several gave 10 francs each. As there were, however, three important chiefs who gave good presents, the skin was divided, and a piece presented to each. In the San Salvador district the old custom is still maintained, and no modification such as this is permitted; but petty local jealousy was the cause of this alteration of the custom in a district where there is no great overlord.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### WARFARE AND ITS USAGES

IN dealing with this aspect of the native's life, I scarcely know how to classify him—as brave or cowardly. It may be best to catalogue him according to the weapon he uses in the fight. The Lower Congo man with his flint-lock gun is ridiculous, and is to be regarded more as a joke than condemned as a coward; but the Upper Congo man with his spear against spear can render such a good account of himself that we would rather have him on our side than arrayed against us. I have seen the native make war with both kinds of weapons, and I would prefer to fight twenty natives with guns than two armed with spears.

The spear is wielded by the Upper Congo men (only a tribe here and there uses the bow and arrow); but the flint-lock gun is the only fighting weapon used in warfare by the Lower Congo people, and it is about the latter that we are writing. According to an ancient sixteenth-century account, the weapons of the Lower Congo warrior at that time consisted of bows, arrows, axes, swords, spears, daggers, and shields; but these have been entirely superseded by paltry, cheap, flint-lock guns, introduced by traders, the barrels of which, in most cases, have been fashioned out of old gas-piping, and frequently do more damage to the person firing them than to the one at whom they are fired. The stock and fixings are in keeping with the barrel. The powder used is generally adulterated, and is warranted to make more noise and smoke than do damage—such powder has little carrying power, and less penetrating force. The bullets are bits of twisted brass wire, broken iron ore, stones, or pieces of metal broken small enough to go down the barrel.

When the gun is loaded for firing, the fighter does not press the butt into his right shoulder and look along the barrel as he takes aim; but he holds the butt of the gun against the palm of his half-extended right hand, and, without taking aim, he pulls the trigger with a finger of his left hand. By this mode of firing he guards his eyes from the sparks of the powder as it flashes in the pan, and his head from being blown off should the barrel burst from the excessive charge of powder forced into the barrel; but the aim being unsteady and uncertain, the object fired at is more secure than the objects in its immediate vicinity. The Congo gun will not carry more than about fifty yards, but the combatants, when firing, stand about a hundred yards from each other, and the result generally is an almost bloodless war. I have known over two hundred men fight thirty-two, and after these unequal sides had fired at each other for two and a half days, one man was struck on the ankle by a spent plug, which penetrated the flesh so slightly that I was able to remove it with my pen-knife.

The King at San Salvador can proclaim war with a town without consulting anyone, even his head-men; but a chief in his district who wants to fight another chief must gain the permission of the King first, and then the consent of the district chief; and to ensure their neutrality he presents a pig to the King, and a larger or smaller portion of a pig to the other chiefs according to their status. Chiefs living in distant localities would not consult the King, but only the chiefs of their districts, and divide the pig, or pigs, among them. A new palm-frond shaken out, and put in a prominent place on a house or on a town, is used by a person or a town to indicate absolute neutrality in any local war, and ensures respect by the antagonists.

On the declaration of war between two towns, a strong charm is made by the medicine-man killing a frog which he burns with the twigs taken from three special trees (the *lem-banzau*, the *lolo*, and the *mfilu*), and the ashes of these four things are made into a paste by the addition of some water. This paste is put into small snail shells, one of which is given



as a charm to each fighting man. The men then walk round one of the above-named trees, and on returning to the town some palm wine is mixed with the paste remaining in the saucepan in which it was compounded, and all drink of it. After each man has drunk a little of this concoction, the medicine-man takes the pot down to the road leading to the town which is to be attacked, and stands it in the road. Every fighting man who proposes to go to the war must jump over the saucepan, and if one stumbles, or touches it with his foot, he is compelled to remain at home, for the omen shows that if he goes to the fight he will be killed. The frog is used in compounding this charm, because the natives have noticed that the frog's heart "lives" (*i.e.* pulsates) for some time after it is taken from the body—an evidence of that tenacity of life which they hope will be imparted to them. During the whole period of the war the men are not allowed to have any intercourse with women, or the charm will be nullified.

In another district other means are used, as follows: they send for a medicine-man (of the *elemba* order),<sup>1</sup> who takes some palm wine in a wooden plate or bowl, and, dipping his fingers in the wine, he touches the lips of the fighters with the front, the back, and then the front again of his fingers; and tells them that they must neither look back, nor enter a house, but go right away to the fight; hence this ceremony is performed immediately before they set out for the enemy's town. This particular charm places them under a spell, so that they have no need to fear any possibility of harm or danger.

The men, women, and children who remain at home procure the *nzaji* fetish (said to cause lightning), or the *mbambi* fetish (able to give a horrible disease), or the *mbanzangola* fetish (wooden image able to give severe pain), whichever they can borrow, or, the one in which they have the greatest faith; and they dance the *nloko* dance to remove or destroy any witch-

<sup>1</sup> *Lemba*=soothe, appease, remove evil spells, and is a protective charm from violent death by an enemy. *Sungu*=violent death—the war fetish used to kill the enemy. Each has its own fetish-man.

craft that may be employed against their friends in the fight; and as they gyrate round and round the fetish they shout: "You fetish, you must kill anyone who is bewitching our fighting men." For it must be remembered that any man killed in a fight does not die by bullet or knife, but by witchcraft.

Should a man happen to be killed during the attack, the fight rages round the corpse for its possession, and often in fighting for the body several others are killed by knives and sticks used at close quarters. If the corpse falls into the enemy's hands, they cut off the head, and, after soaking it in water until the skull is cleaned of all flesh, they fix it on a pole and place it at the entrance to the victor's town, or in a prominent position on a hill—as an emblem of shame to the conquered. Sometimes the skull is cleaned and used by the victor as a drinking cup. The reason why they fight so fiercely for the body is that, if the head is cut off, the spirit of the slaughtered man will haunt, and by witchcraft kill, not the man who slew him, but the members of his own family. Thus, on the one hand, they fight to preserve the body intact so as not to have the vengeance of the spirit falling on them as a family, and on the other hand they strive to mutilate the enemy's body that his family may be done to death by the spirit owning the headless body. On returning victorious from a fight there is much dancing and firing of guns.

Sometimes the towns fighting will exhaust their stock of gunpowder before either side has gained any advantage over the other. A truce is then made for two or three months while they lay in another supply, and on the appointed day they will start firing again at each other. I have known this to happen more than once, and in those localities gunpowder has advanced in price. At other times they have agreed to postpone the commencement of a fight until each side has a good supply of powder, and this also has sent up the price of powder throughout the district.

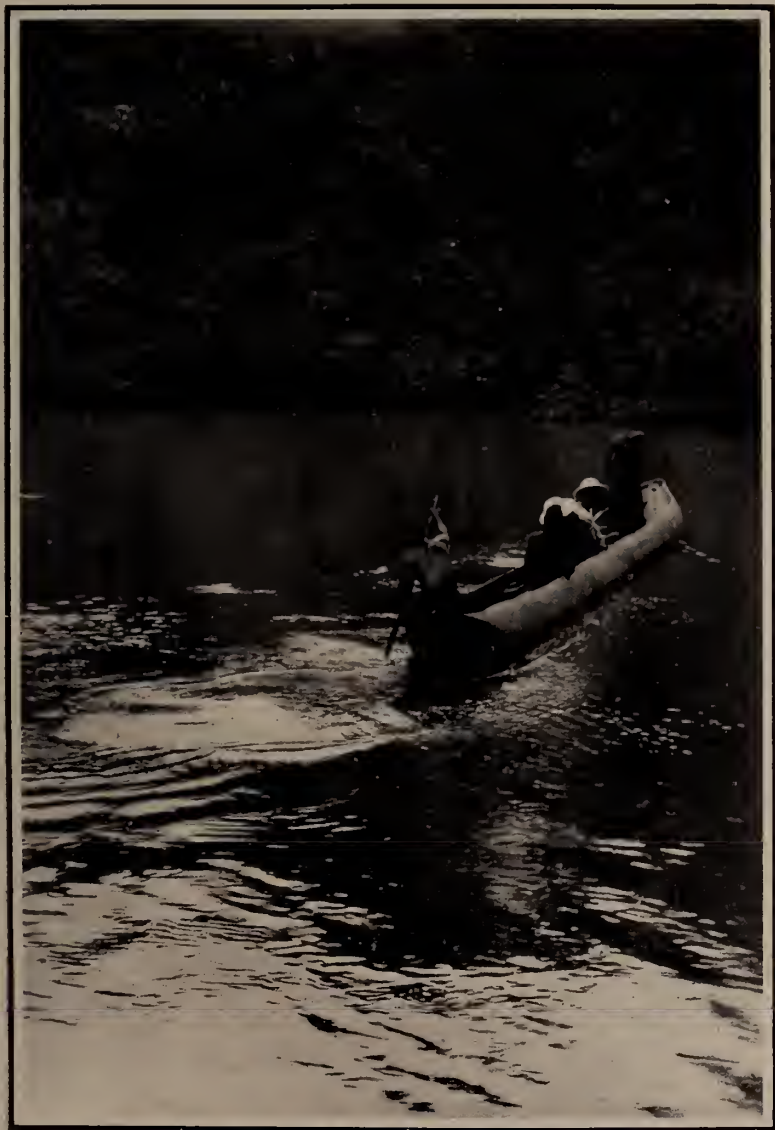
When two towns, A and B, are fighting, and it is noticed that B, the smaller of the two, is losing, then the neighbouring friendly chiefs will advise the chief of B to sue for peace

with a white goat (*nkombo a maboko*). Should he agree to this proposal, a white goat is bought, and one of the chiefs carries it on his shoulders to the scene of the fighting, the chief of B leading the way by walking immediately in front of the one carrying the goat. On drawing near to the fighting place they call out loudly, "Peace! Peace! Peace!" (*Luve! Luve! Luve!*). And upon hearing those words the fighters must stop at once. The chief of B takes the goat, and kneeling before the chief of A, he says, "I do not want to fight." The chief of A *must* accept the goat, and there is no more fighting until the case has been arbitrated upon properly by the local chiefs.

If it is an unconditional peace, not to be followed either by a lawsuit or by arbitration, a medicine-man is sent for who brings with him some stalks, leaves, and palm wine. He squeezes the juice out of the stalks and leaves into the palm wine and mixes them; and then dipping the leaves in the mixture, he touches the two chiefs with the liquid and sprinkles the rest among the fighters and inhabitants of the two towns who are present, and thus peace is established.

The making of blood-brotherhood after a bad quarrel, or after a fight between towns, is performed as follows: If it is a quarrel the two opponents, if a war, the chiefs of the towns fighting, have a little blood taken from each of them, and each drinks the blood taken from the other; then two needles are solemnly buried, and a lasting peace is thus made, and the whilom enemies become staunch friends and brothers—more than that, they are one, for have they not each other's blood in their bodies? It may be that the burying of the needles is a remnant of "the burying of the hatchet."

In September 1882 I was tramping about, with seven men and some lads as carriers, in the Madimba district, south of San Salvador; and on Friday, September 29, I left Sengene with the intention of sleeping at Mputu, and then turning off to spend a few days in Mbangu before starting home to San Salvador. However, we had not left Sengene far behind when we heard that two towns were fighting right in our path. We



*Lent by*

*Rev. J. L. Forfeitt*

#### FERRY ACROSS THE RIVER KWILU

These dug-out canoes are used for crossing rivers too wide to bridge and too deep to ford. Both natives and white men pay a small toll for the convenience.





changed our road, but on reaching the next town, the folk called out to one of my carriers, "Lema, Lema, your town is fighting, and if you go on you will be killed."

Resolving, if possible, to carry out our programme, I changed my carrier, but we had not proceeded very far when we met some men who said to my carriers (who were all San Salvador men, except the carrier, Lema, whom we had left behind), "Don't go that road; the King has sent some men to fight, and if the enemy see you they will try to shoot some of you."

My carriers were heavily laden and unarmed, so to force them forward, with the probability of meeting armed enemies, would have been extremely unfair to the men. There was nothing for it but to return to San Salvador by a roundabout way, so as to avoid an attack being made on my carriers. There were six towns fighting one, and knowing the combatants well I had not the slightest fear that they would interfere with me; but I was anxious about my men.

In the town where we heard the news that the King had sent a few men to the fight, we were able to procure a guide to take us by a circuitous track to San Salvador, as the proper road ran right among the towns that were fighting. There was no slow walking now; not a single man lagged behind, each man pressing on the heels of the next in front. It was not a pleasant walk, for the guide stopped frequently and raised his hand for silence while he listened for any rustling in the tall grass through which we could not see a dozen feet. Then the guide loaded his gun ready for an emergency, and after that he stopped often to look to the priming, and on we would go again—pushing our way through the thick, entangled grass.

For an hour and a half we walked to the firing of the combatants as we made the detour to give them a wide berth; and at one place, from the top of a high hill, we could see the fighting in the valley below. They were formed in two opposite lines, each being well covered by trees, boulders, &c. We could see a man loading his gun, then he walked forward, pointed his gun in the direction of the enemy, and fired, after

which he hurried back to cover; then another went and repeated the former's action, and so on up and down the line. The lines were more than two hundred yards apart, and no fighter went in close enough to the other side for his gun to send a bullet among the enemy. The grass hid them from one another, and the only chance of damage was for two men to meet accidentally in the space between the lines, when they had gone forward to fire; but apparently they listened too carefully for every rustle in the grass. The surprise to me is, not that there are so few killed in their fights, but that anyone is killed. I stood looking for some time, and although many guns were fired and there was plenty of flashes, smoke, and noise, not a single fighter fell, and we heard afterwards not a solitary wound was inflicted.

In that walk we had to break our way through bush and jungle to elude any of the enemy who might remember that we had San Salvador men in our caravan, and that we were behind them and unarmed. We all reached San Salvador in the late afternoon, nothing the worse for our adventure than a good appetite and badly blistered feet.

What was the reason for this fight? It was not until some time after that I heard all the particulars, and they are interesting, as illustrating the native mode of thought and action in these matters.

Tulante Bidi was the chief of Lemvo, a town about fifteen miles south of San Salvador. About 1880 Bidi's nephew, Nlemvo, became the personal boy of a missionary living at San Salvador, who some time later brought him to England, but not without first receiving permission from the King. When Bidi heard that his nephew had left for England, he accused the King of selling him to the white man, and despaired of ever seeing his nephew again. The King, however, assured him that it was all right, that he was responsible for the lad, and would see that he returned in due time. Bidi had to comfort himself with this assurance, and knowing the King as he did, and being ignorant and superstitious about the white man, it was not much consolation that he received from the King's words.

Months passed by and the grass-burning season arrived, and as Bidi wanted to burn a patch of bush that lay along the boundary of his own land and that belonging to another chief, he, according to custom, sent word to the said chief, and arranged to meet him and his people at a certain time on a stated day, that the hunters of both towns might burn the grass together, and jointly hunt the animals driven out by the fire. Bidi and his people arrived at the appointed place, but no Kimpanza people were there, and after waiting a considerable time Bidi and his men started back for their town. They had not proceeded very far on their way when the other chief arrived, and, without waiting or calling, he fired the bush. This was both an unlawful and discourteous act.

On seeing the smoke, Bidi and his men returned and asked why they had fired the bush without them, and had so insultingly broken the custom of the country. The Kimpanza people asked him who he was, and what could he do, and twitted him with having his nephew taken away by the white man; that he, a chief, had sold his nephew for cloth. No sooner did Bidi hear this taunt than he ordered his men to fire on the others. There was a fight, but no one was killed. The Kimpanza people told the King, who gave them permission to fight, and told them to "go and fetch the ridge-pole of Bidi's house." To take the ridge-pole of the chief's house against whom you are fighting is something like capturing the standard in an English battle. This the Kimpanza people tried to do but failed, although several towns joined their side, and only one other town took Bidi's side.

The skirmishing lasted some weeks, and then a man on Bidi's side was killed, and that stopped the fight. The man killed was a slave, and his owner said, "How is it my slave was killed and no one else? Surely he was bewitched." And he accused Bidi of bewitching him, and Bidi would have had to drink the ordeal; but the slain man was a slave, and no free man or chief takes the ordeal on account of the death of a slave; consequently the owner could not press the accusation.

Some months after the fighting was over Bidi's nephew,

Nlemvo, returned to San Salvador from England. The King treated him well, but said that, on account of Bidi's complaint and attitude, Nlemvo could not proceed to his uncle's town until the uncle had paid him a girl slave, and five thousand strings of blue pipe beads. In the meantime Bidi had died, and his brother, who succeeded him, had to pay the slave, and Nlemvo paid the beads, and thus ended a fight that for several weeks embroiled and disturbed a district the size of a small English county.

## CHAPTER XIX

### MARKET DAYS AND TRADING

IT is acknowledged by all who know him that the Congo native is a born trader. He is ever keen to drive a bargain to his own advantage, and unwearying in his pursuit of profits. Those who do not know him misjudge him as lazy, but I doubt very much if his accusers would take his long journeys and carry his heavy loads to procure the wherewithal to meet his obligations as a man, a father, and a husband. After long trading journeys he has his holiday—his rest-time, in which to recuperate himself from the starving diet of the road, and the strain of carrying up and down hills a very heavy load ; but he must work to meet his expenses. And besides, every native is ambitious to have a grand funeral, one that will be the talk of the country-side for many a day to come. With that ever in view, he attends the markets far and wide, and when he has gathered sufficient produce he takes the long, toilsome journey to the “coast” to dispose of his goods to the white traders. No one accuses the members of the Stock Exchange, or the shopkeepers of the Strand, of laziness, because they do not till the earth to grow wheat or cabbages ; neither should the black man be charged with idleness because he is not always found with a hoe in his hand. There are both lazy and industrious men to be found among the natives, and the latter are in the majority.

Native traders, having collected articles of trade, such as goats, pigs, sheep, various kinds of farm produce, palm wine, slaves, and manufactured goods, take them to the markets, which are four in number, viz. *Konzo*, *Nkenge*, *Nsona*, and *Nkandu*, these have given their names to the four days that comprise the Congo week.<sup>1</sup> All the markets held on a

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, Note IV, p. 308, “Times and Seasons.”



certain day all over the Lower Congo are called *Konzo*, and all the markets held the next day are named *Nkenge*. These markets are all held in different places, *e.g.* all the *Konzo* markets are held on different sites from all the markets held on the three successive days. These market-places are so arranged that one in four will be within two or three miles (sometimes much closer) of a town, the next day's market may be ten miles away from the first town, but near some other town or towns, and the next from fifteen to twenty miles, and the next perhaps twenty-five miles away from the first town. Thus every village throughout the whole of Lower Congo has at least one market during the week within a reasonable distance of its doors. If, many years ago, a family moved into a part of the country far distant from all the markets, then they established one on a neutral site, and tried to make it popular to induce others to attend it; and on whatever day they started it, it took the name of all the other markets held on that day, and came in its proper order.

Besides the market-day name as mentioned above, the natives often affix to them the name of a prominent town or place near which they are held, to distinguish them from all the other markets of that name held on that day, *e.g.* *Nsona* Ngungu is the *Nsona* market held near the town of Ngungu; and the *Nsona* Kiyenji is held near the town of Kiyenji. Thus, if a man of Ngombe Lutete district said that he was going to *Nsona*, everyone would know that he was going to visit the nearest market of that name; but if he stated that he was going to *Nsona* Ngungu, they would know at once that he intended walking thirty miles across country to trade on the market of that name, near the Thysville railway station. Again, some of these markets are more famous than others for certain articles that are always to be found for sale on them. For instance, at one *Nkenge* you can always be sure of finding pigs for sale, hence those trading in pigs consequently travel to that particular *Nkenge*; another *Nkenge* will be noted for pots, pipes, water-bottles, and various kinds of pottery; a certain *Nsona* will be famous for the amount of trade cloth,

and another for the quantity of gunpowder always for sale; but although at these markets there may be large quantities of the one article for which the market is noted, yet there will also be food, &c., for sale. Other markets are very general in their character, having a little of everything exposed for sale—sugar-cane, cassava roots, cassava flour, native bread, cloths, knives, flint-lock guns, pots, baskets, tobacco, sweet potatoes, yams, dried meats, fowls, trinkets, necklaces, &c. &c.

There are also five great markets that are held every eight days, not on the same but on the successive eighth days. These are named *Nkenge* Nkila, which is held in French Congo, just north of the main river; *Konzo* Makwekwe, held in Ngombe Lutete district; *Konzo* Kikandikila, held about three days south of Wathen mission station; *Konzo* Kinsuka, near the boundary of the Portuguese and Belgian Congos; and *Nkenge* Elembelo, not far from San Salvador. There is thus a line of these great markets, the gathering-places of large crowds of people from very wide areas, held every eighth day, stretching from San Salvador right through the country, and crossing the river into what is now known as French Congo; and it is very probable that they run south to Angola, and well north into Landana, *i.e.* that they are only limited by the boundaries of the old Kingdom of Kongo, which formerly included both those places; and it may be that they also run east and west. In the old days these eighth-day markets were the chief places for native-made cloth (*mbadi*), and for the fibre (*mpusu*) employed in its manufacture.

Before the coming of the white man the articles used for bartering purposes on the markets were: native cloth (*tika yambadi*), made in very small pieces from two to three inches wide and from six to eight inches long; native-made knives (*mbele za mfudila*); hoes (*nsengo*), and various other small things made by hand. After the arrival of the white man the currency changed to red beads (*mbembe*), thick black beads (*matadi mankolo*), and blue glass beads (*nzimbu za ndombe*—or *nzimbu* for short). The latter are so freely and plentifully used that they are really the equivalent for money, and the standard of

all prices, especially around San Salvador. In the Ngombe Lutete district brass rods were more popular than beads, and thus became the currency, the medium of barter, and the standard of prices. Thirty odd years ago the brass rod then in use was twenty-seven inches long, but now it is scarcely five inches. Those who came into the possession of a number of brass rods cut a half inch off each, so as to procure for nothing the brass for his or her ornaments, and then passed the shortened rods into circulation, and others cut off pieces for the same purpose. Suddenly they awoke to the fact that there was not so much brass in their rods—that they were short; but there were so many in circulation that they agreed to take the short rods by giving, and receiving, an increased number for the cloth or goats, &c., for sale. The process of shortening still went on, together with the consequent giving of an increased number for an article, so that now the rod is as short as it can get without entirely vanishing altogether. Thirty years ago a good fowl could be bought for two or three rods; but a hundred and fifty would now be given of the very small rods for the same size fowl. Along with the shortening of the rod has also been the pouring into the country, by many steamers, of hundreds, if not thousands, of tons of the brass wire used for cutting into rods, and this factor has also helped to increase the cost of native produce, and decrease the buying power of brass rods. In fact, brass rods, and, in a minor degree, blue pipe beads, are a drug in the market, and the white man, who only has these kinds of money in his store, will either have to starve, or give such prices for his food that he will find the cost of living in a first-class European hotel much cheaper. He must have now all kinds of good cloth, clothes, enamel ware, trinkets, jewellery, in fact, a multiple store in miniature to supply the demand: and if he has something the native wants, and no other trader has it, he can demand almost any price in reason. European money is gradually gaining ground, and in the near future will probably supplant this present mode of barter.

Before the arrival of missionaries, the natives did not know



*Photo by*

# NATIVE CURRENCY—CHURCH COLLECTION, LOWER CONGO

*the Author*

20 boxes of matches ; 2 eggs ; 200 gun-caps ; 1 rug ; 1 umbrella ; 1 tin of gunpowder ; 1 calabash of gunpowder ; 2 pieces of cloth ; 1 bottle of kerosine ; 15 francs (cash) ; and 3373 short brass rods. The whole represents 8931 brass rods (Congo money), or £2 19s. 6d. English money.





any way of writing down their business transactions. All accounts respecting debits and credits were retained in the memory; and as their memories were sometimes at fault, especially in regard to what they owed to others, there were frequently bitter quarrels and fights among them, which often led to lawsuits and big "palavers." One way of helping the memory was to tie knots in a piece of twine. A man on a journey would tie a knot in a piece of string for every day he was on the road, and thus know for certain at the end of his travels how many days he had been *en route*. If two or more men wished to meet on a certain day, say, fifteen days hence, they would each take a piece of string and tie fifteen knots in it, and as each day passed they would cut off a knot, until at last they would see that the appointed day had arrived. For counting months, or native weeks, *i.e.* sets of four market days, they would cut notches in a stick—a notch for every month, or every week, as the case might be. For counting tens, pieces of grass or palm-nuts or pellets of clay were used, whichever might be handy at the time of counting; but sometimes a mark with the finger was made on the ground. Our ordinary old English tally was known and used, *i.e.* notches cut across a piece of wood, and then the wood split down the middle, each of the two parties concerned in the transaction it recorded, taking one-half of the tally stick. In counting tens, they counted three, then two, and put those together to make five; then another three and a two, and, putting those together, they pushed them over to the other five and thus made a ten; and having made a series of tens they counted them in threes and twos, and fives to make the ten tens, *i.e.* a hundred—a clumsy method, but it was necessary in order to check each other's counting.

There is, and has been for many years, a firmly-established law that no force of any kind, under any circumstances, shall be used on the markets—no raiding, no thieving of goods, and no capturing of people—that is, that the market-place must be regarded as absolutely neutral ground. At one time not a single weapon of any description was allowed within the

boundaries of the markets. The infringement of any of these rules brought down on the offender the vengeance of the whole country-side. There are traditions of such offenders, but their punishment was such as to deter others from following in their footsteps. Sometimes rowdy, reckless rascals would meet small unprotected parties on the way to market, and would rob them of their goods, and even steal some of the people and sell them on a distant market or at the "coast."

When the white men had built their stations, or factories, at the "coast" (and coast here means not only the sea shore, but also the banks of the River Congo from the Noqui to Matadi), the natives took peanuts, palm kernels, ivory and slaves to them in exchange for salt, gunpowder, flint-lock guns, trade cloth, &c.; and about 1877 they started the rubber trade. It was about that time that the chigoe<sup>1</sup> (or jigger) appeared: for apparently it was brought to the district of San Salvador from the sea coast by those who had travelled there with rubber for sale. It was then called "the insect beneath the skin" (*ntanda*), and as they noticed that these insects hopped about after they came from under the skin, they called them the bounding or jumping insect (*ntand' a ndangwa*); and they have always associated them with rubber, which bounces about. It is now more commonly known by the natives as *dede*. It is the *Pulex penetrans*.

When a caravan of native traders is ready to start for the white man's trading factory, they call a luck-giving medicine-man. The medicine-man of this particular cult has a luck-giving bag of charms, containing pieces of leopard's skin, hyæna's skin, lion's skin, and, in fact, a piece of the skin of every strong animal he could procure, and also some albino's hair. The name for this charm is *mpungu*, which means mighty, all-powerful; and sometimes these things were put into an image (*sole*=a figure with grass tied round its neck, knotted back and front) as being more easy to carry. This medicine-man is supposed to have the power of making his customers to be specially favoured by women, slaves, and also by his family and

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, Note V, p. 309, "The Chigoe."

friends, and very fortunate in trading. Those people who by us are regarded as being the special favourites of Dame Fortune are, in this part of Congo, thought to be in possession of this bag of charms or the image containing them.

The price for this charm is one slave, and as only rich people can afford to give that price, the idea is consequently fostered that such a fetish really gives good luck to its happy owner. This medicine-man can not only impart good luck to his clients, but, if paid, he can remove good luck from his client's enemies, and overwhelm them with misfortune; he has only to tap on the image, and hold it up and down three times and hang it outside his house, and away its spirit will fly to ruin the person against whom it has been invoked.

On the arrival of this medicine-man he sits down in the middle of the caravan, which stands round him with their loads tied ready for the journey, and puts the image in front of him. He speaks to the fetish image, telling it to give the traders good luck on the road, and at the trading factory. A man then takes a fowl by the head, and the medicine-man holds it by the body, cuts off its head, and allows the blood to drop on the image. This is to appease and refresh the fetish power in the image. The fowl is then cooked, and divided among the traders who are going on the journey, for them to eat. This fowl is cooked and eaten in the open air, and during and after this ceremony no one must go into a house or turn back from the road. The fowl having been eaten, the medicine-man places a shell containing very small bits of everything in the bag of charms, and this he puts in the road leading out of the town by which the caravan will travel to the "coast." Every person in the caravan—man or woman, boy or girl—must step over this shell, and if anyone touches it with his foot he is not allowed to proceed, for according to the omen he will die on the journey; and after stepping over the shell no member of the party must look back or he will destroy his luck. Some, in order to keep the powerful luck-giving fetish in a good humour, sacrifice a goat to it every month, whether they go on a journey or not. The blood is poured over the image, and

the flesh is eaten by the trader and his family, for it must not be sold—only a comparatively rich man can afford such an offering.

The members of a caravan when passing through a town must not let their sticks touch the ground, or they will destroy the luck of the town, and thus lay themselves open to a heavy fine. To avoid this most carriers put their staffs across their right shoulders and under the end of their loads, which are usually carried through a town or village on their left shoulders. The carriers while travelling in the open country or bush hitch up their cloths to their girdles, thus exposing their thighs, to give greater freedom in the moving of their legs, but on passing through a village or town they must drop their cloths out of respect for the people, and for the sake of decency, otherwise they will be taken to the chief's house and beaten. Neither may carriers when passing through a town carry their loads on their heads, as that would be resented by the inhabitants of the town as the height of haughtiness and pride, and arousing the anger of the people, would result in a fight and the imposition of a heavy fine.

While *en route* to the trading factory, the above customs have to be carefully observed, and in addition payments are made for the use of bridges crossing unfordable rivers, and for the ferrying canoes employed in taking the caravan over deep, wide rivers. When passing through the principal towns of the districts, or the country belonging to a great overlord, a toll must be paid to ensure protection. On payment of the tax, the chief receiving it is responsible for the safety of the caravan; and the tax is fixed according to the number of the carriers in the caravan, and the value of the goods they carry. Rubber and ivory pay a heavier tax than peanuts and palm-kernels. The tax must be reasonable, or otherwise native traders will make wide detours to avoid exorbitant chiefs. The Zombo traders, paying toll to the King of Kongo at San Salvador, travelled with their produce as far as Noqui, a matter of ten days' journey; but as a rule a caravan rarely went more than six or seven days from home, and if there was a white trader within that limit so much the more profitable to them, and the better selection of trade goods from which to choose; but if there



were no white traders within the sphere of safe travelling, then they sold their goods to other native traders, who carried them nearer the coast, and thus the produce of Central Africa filtered through more than one middle-man to the white traders for shipment to Europe. And as each middle-man received a profit out of the transaction, it was to their interest to keep the white man from penetrating through to the interior of the country and dealing direct with the natives. The belt of middle-men round Africa have done much to keep it a closed and unknown continent—their profits were in danger.

In the old days some trade was done in ivory, but not much, as it was thought that the person who sold ivory, sold in the hollow part of the tusk the spirit of the people of his town. If a man took a tusk to the "coast," and while he was away a person died in the town, the trader on his return was accused of witchcraft, and had to take the ordeal, although it was, and is, the usual custom not to charge an absentee with bewitching any person in his village. A powerful chief sold ivory in spite of this superstition, but even he was careful not to sell large quantities for fear of public opinion, and the above consequences of the ordeal.

During the rainy season of 1883 and 1884 not much rain fell on the towns and farms behind Noqui and Ango-ango; and the folk of that district said that those carrying ivory through their country to the white traders at the above places, were carrying in the cavities of the tusks the bodies of dead people to sell to the traders, and the said dead bodies destroyed their luck, and consequently they had no rains. They stopped all trade between the hinterland and the trading factories at the above places. The writer was on the road between San Salvador and Noqui, travelling towards the latter place, when his carriers heard that the Noqui people had caught a native trader taking ivory to a trading-house for sale. They took the ivory away, and cut the unfortunate man's mouth literally from ear to ear. The writer's carriers were so alarmed at this that he had to make a wide detour and pass through Mpalapala to reach his friends at Tunduwa station. This shutting of the road continued so long, and injured trade so much, that the



traders of Noqui and Ango-ango joined forces, marched on the towns and burnt them down. One white trader was killed in the fight, but the road was eventually opened again.

The writer, while living at San Salvador, was visited by some Zombo natives, and after much persuasion he induced some of the bolder ones to enter his house. One of the first things they did was to look carefully round the walls of the rooms. On questioning them, we learned from them and others that they were looking for the shelves upon which we were supposed to store dead bodies until we had an opportunity of sending them for shipment to the "coast"; and their idea was that we, as well as white traders dealing in ivory, bought the dead bodies of the natives, and sent them to Europe, where, by some means, they were resuscitated, and worked for us as slaves. Hence their fear to enter, their close scrutiny of the walls for storing shelves, and their surprise at seeing no dead bodies. The fact of our being missionaries did not allay their suspicions; and the other fact, that we never traded in ivory or anything else, nor ever sent anything to the "coast," did not allay their fears. They regarded us with greater dread, as they thought we were so subtle as to hide our real reason for living there—the buying of dead bodies, under a show of kindness and goodness. It took a weary time to disarm suspicion, and gain their confidence.

With regard to rubber, the natives at first did not know that it was of any value, and consequently they were slow to use it as an article of trade, although there were numerous vines in the forests. They thought it was of no commercial value; but as soon as they found it was saleable, they tapped the vines, boiled the sap, and carried it, at first secretly, to the trader. The reason for this secrecy was that those who introduce any new article of trade, &c. have had to pay for their cleverness by becoming the objects of a suspicion that often ended in a charge of witchcraft and death. There is a rumour that the man who first discovered palm wine forfeited his life as a witch; and there is a district well known to the writer where gum copal was found to have a commercial value, but through superstitious fear a prohibition was put on its sale by the chiefs and the majority of the people, and the man who discovered its

value was threatened with the ordeal if he persisted in selling any more. Since then education and enlightenment have spread in that district, and the more progressive folk would disregard the prohibition, but unfortunately they are afraid to sell it in any quantities lest the authorities should hear of it, and demand the article in part payment of their taxes, and their last state thus become worse than their first. Other articles of great commercial value like cotton, and an oil-giving seed (*Sesamum Indicum*), have been suppressed for the same reason; but we sincerely hope that the Belgian Government by the wiser methods they have introduced (wiser and better than those that prevailed under the disastrous régime of the now defunct Congo Free State), will so win the confidence of the people that they will fully reveal the resources of their country, and co-operate with one another in the development of them for the benefit of all.

Besides selling ivory and rubber, slaves were also sold to the white traders, especially at the sea coast. Those sold as slaves varied in character, age, and sex. Inveterate thieves, men who committed adultery and could not pay the fine imposed, lawless rascals who broke the laws of their districts and were too poor to pay their fines, folk kidnapped while going to or from a market, those who tried to escape from the secret society, those too weak to resist the tyranny of the strong bully, found their way to the trading houses as chattels of barter. A family would also sell one of its members to clear itself of debt, and a bankrupt would be carried off to clear himself of debt by the sale of his body. Sometimes these debts were not legitimate ones in the sense of being a proper business transaction between two persons for, say, a thousand brass rods, equal with interest to forty or fifty shillings; but a mean advantage taken of a temporary difficulty, *e.g.* a man one day wanted ten brass rods to finish a purchase. He borrowed the rods, and the lender might hate the man, and sell him within a day or two as a slave, or he might transfer the debt to an enemy with the same evil result—slavery for life for the sake of ten brass rods; and it has been done for even two brass rods—worth a penny. Those who were proved by the ordeal to be guilty of witchcraft, and those who were

murderers, could not be sold as slaves, nor could they be re-deemed at any price by their families—they had taken life and must pay a life.

On the arrival of the caravan at the trading factory, and the price for the produce having been agreed upon, the “money” the native traders received comprised the following articles: salt (*mungwa*), cloth (*nlele*), plates (*malonga*), dishes and basins (*mbasinga*), mugs, cups, and glasses (*kopo*), gunpowder (*tiya twa mputu*=white man’s fire), &c. Guns (*mata*) were sometimes bought; those with short barrels were called *lung’ e kumbi*, and those with long ones *nkombo*=goat, probably because they cost the price of a goat. In a trader’s store there were more than sixty different articles of barter, and in these days the number has greatly increased, as has already been mentioned.

In the old days (and only recently has the custom ceased) the white man gave to all trading caravans a demijohn (large or small, according to the amount of produce sold) of gin or rum as a present. It may be interesting to note here the derivation of a word that has now travelled all over the country, and is used as an equivalent for present, free gift, tip, *bakshish*, &c., viz. *matabixu*. It is made up of two Portuguese words—*matar*, to kill, and *bicha*, a serpent or snake. It was the practice of the Portuguese trader to give a customer a tot of rum to kill, as they phrased it, the serpent or snake, i.e. a biting in the stomach. By and by this word was applied to any make-weight given on the top of an agreed price, and hence to a present, gift, or tip, in recognition of little services rendered.

Attached to each trading house is an interpreter (*linguistere*), who is engaged and paid by the manager of the factory to act as a medium between himself and the native traders. Living in the villages near trading centres like Noqui, San Salvador, &c., are trade brokers (also called *linguisteres*), who make long journeys into the hinterland, where by their presents to various native traders and chiefs they work up a connection among them. I have known one such broker to give away between 150 and 200 pieces of cloth, besides all the cost of his caravan in food and pay, in the hope that he might sell for



*Photo by*

#### BREAD FRUIT TREE

*Rev. W. Wooding*

These, like many other fruit trees, are of comparatively recent introduction into the country. The natives appreciate them now as much as the white men.





them when they came with produce for sale to the white traders in his part of the country.

The factory interpreter receives a monthly wage from his master, and he is expected to use all his persuasive powers with the native traders to induce them to sell their produce to his employer only, and his master will give him an extra commission if he is successful; and he can also draw something from the deal by representing to the native that the white trader has offered less than he really has. The interpreters often entertain prospective customers of their masters, and not infrequently give the members of the caravan a demijohn of palm wine to gain their goodwill. Among the interpreters, and also among the brokers, there is keen rivalry for the opportunity of acting as the medium of the deal—the interpreter fighting to keep his lucrative position by introducing the trade to his own employer, and the broker trying to procure the business that he might recoup himself for his heavy outlay. The white traders never appear on the scene until the native enters his compound or his store with the produce for sale; but it is more than probable that they were pulling the strings through their touts to draw the trade to their own particular factory; and I must say, that from all the accounts I have heard both from native and white traders about each other, they never used other than legitimate means.

The native trader and the carriers loaded with his produce arrive at the Noqui, and he is met by the broker who has visited his town in the interior, and who, by his presents and glibness of tongue, has received the promise to act as his salesman, as his intermediary with the white trader. The broker conducts his client to the white trader, and a conversation such as the following will take place—the white trader and the broker talking Portuguese to one another, and the broker and native trader talking only in the Congo language:

Broker to white man: "How much for these tusks?"

They are carefully examined and weighed, and then the white man replies to the broker: "I will give 400 pieces of cloth for them" (a piece of cloth, invoice price, costs from 1s. 6d. to 2s., that is about the price of a standard piece of a

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certain quality of 12 yards to the piece, probably the first kind introduced by the early traders).

Broker to native: "He will give you 180 pieces."

Native to broker: "That is not enough, I want 450 pieces."

Broker to white man: "They want 500 pieces."

White man: "No, that is far too much, I will pay 420."

Broker to native: "The white man says that he will give you 210 pieces."

After more haggling the white man reaches his limit of 450 pieces; and after much talking, lasting perhaps a whole day, the native trader brings down his price to 360 pieces, and the broker works his up gradually to that amount. This chaffering may last three or four days, but the price being now agreed upon, the broker tells the white man to pay them 360 pieces, which he does in articles from his store: a case of beads may equal eight pieces, a common gun one piece, a better gun three pieces, a fine cloth four pieces, a demijohn of rum four pieces, a case of a dozen bottles of gin<sup>1</sup> two pieces, and so they work through the whole of the 360 pieces, taking out looking-glasses, gunpowder, cloths of various patterns and qualities. The native trader takes these goods back to his own locality and sells them retail on the various markets in buying small quantities of produce, at a profit of from 100 to 150 or more per cent. He must be a smart man to remember the cost of the ivory, the expenses of his journeys to and from the "coast," the value of the goods he is taking to sell in his own district, and many other things, such as food for his carriers *en route*, taxes to the chiefs through whose towns he has passed, and tolls for bridges and canoes, or he will have a loss instead of a profit at the end. Having sold his ivory, he sells his rubber, peanuts, &c. in much the same way—the broker always leaving a margin for himself.

After the native trader has left with his caravan, the broker takes the difference between the highest prices mentioned by the white man for the produce, and the actual prices paid to the native trader, which, in the above illustra-

<sup>1</sup> For some years now spirits have not been carried for sale to the natives beyond the Mpozo River, three miles from Matadi.

tion, on the ivory alone is ninety pieces, and on the whole of the business done may reach 156 pieces. This helps to refund him for his disbursements among his clients, for the expenses of his journeys, and for his trouble.

Sometimes the native trader wants more than the broker can afford to give, and he will go off to another white man and use another broker, or that white trader's interpreter, who, having given him little or nothing by way of presents, can, therefore, agree to give him a higher price for his produce. The native trader is 'cute enough to work one broker against another. Sometimes the broker himself will recognise that the white man is not offering a fair price, or that he has not a good assortment of goods in his store, or that their prices are higher than those at the stores of other traders, and he will take his client to another white man's factory.

This system of trading has already died out in some districts, and is fast disappearing in others; and in another generation it will become obsolete, and that is one of the reasons why I have described it in such detail. Men now are often paid in francs for their work on the railway, at the Government offices, and by the traders and others; and with these francs they can buy, in the many shops that have been opened, the articles they desire. Such shops will also accept produce, and will pay for it either in francs or trade goods. On the markets francs and half francs are accepted in payment, but the copper coins—from five centimes upwards—for some reason, are not acceptable to the natives; and for small purchases, brass rods and beads hold their own. At all mission stations, no produce—ivory, rubber, &c.—for export is accepted, neither is money in any form taken, but the barter goods are used for buying fowls, goats, and native foods of every kind, for paying carriers, and workmen. They are not there as traders to buy and export produce; but use barter goods in lieu of money, to meet their household and station expenses; and they are increasingly using francs to meet those demands, which find their way to the shops of legitimate traders; and they will be glad when francs altogether supplant the clumsy, time-wasting method of buying by barter.

## CHAPTER XX

### BLACK AND WHITE MAGIC<sup>1</sup>

THE word *nganga* covers a wide range of meanings, such as medicine-man, sorcerer, exorcist, witch-finder, wizard, fetish-priest, witch-doctor, diviner, fetish-man, &c., but not one *nganga* exercises all these functions. The term is also applied to those persons who have been initiated into the mysteries of the secret societies, and may then be translated as the *knowing ones*, but such initiates rarely act as medicine-men: and it is not necessary for a proper *nganga* to be a member of either of these societies. Each expert works in his own particular line, and rarely takes a case outside of it; and it will be seen from the names of the various medicine-men, that their functions are usually well defined. There are about fifty different classes or orders of medicine-men, and some of them are referred to in the various chapters dealing with different phases of native life, and in those places their names are given and their operations are described, hence only those medicine-men not already mentioned will be found in this chapter.

Most of the medicine-men are engaged in what might be called the "white art" in magic and divination, *e.g.* they use their supposed skill in attempting to free the people from the malign influence of evil spirits, and to cure various diseases. It would be surprising if, during generations of practice, they had not found some remedies for some of the diseases they are constantly treating. There is a great amount of faith-cure of persons suffering from neurotic and imaginary disorders, who

<sup>1</sup> This chapter should be read in conjunction with the chapter on "Religious Beliefs" in *Among Congo Cannibals*, pp. 246-260, by those who desire the full account of Congo fetishism and medicine-men. The chapters are complementary.

pay "doctors" to dance and chant around them; and cures are often effected by change of scene; a person living in the same village month after month, attending the same markets, seeing always the same small circle of acquaintances, becomes poorly, out of health, &c., and goes off to a medicine-man living at a village some hours' journey away, and remains there for a month or six weeks, with the result that they feel better for the change, and return home in improved health. One should be chary of condemning wholesale all the methods employed by the natives for curing themselves of their ailments and diseases. It will be seen that most of the medicine-men can use their fetishes and charms in what we may call the "black art," *i.e.* they can employ their supposed skill in bringing evil and disease on the enemies of their clients.

Men and women on becoming *ngangas* do not take new personal names, except those belonging to the secret society of the "Country-of-the-dead," and they are always called *nkau*; and those desiring to engage in the profession of the witch-doctor enter the different orders by various doors.

By initiation. The witch-finder, the most powerful and wealthy order among the *ngangas*, has an assistant (*esamba*), but before he can be a fully-recognised witch-finder he must learn all the tricks of his master, and it takes a clever and sharp-witted fellow to do that. Besides being cunning, he must be fearless—afraid of nothing and nobody, for his life will often be threatened by those whom he accuses of witchcraft. When the time comes for the assistant to receive full power, his master puts his fetish in the centre of a circle, and his drum near to his pupil. He beats on his drum, shakes his rattle, and tries to drive his fetish power into his assistant. If the pupil sits stolidly taking no notice of the drum-beating and rattle-shaking, the master says his assistant is not fit to be a witch-doctor; but if the pupil sways to and fro to the rhythm of the beaten drum, jumps about like a madman, and does all kinds of stupid things—as they suppose under the influence of the fetish power that has entered him—he is pronounced a fully-initiated witch-doctor, being now possessed



by the fetish power of his master, from whom he has already learned the secret of his tricks.

By payment to a *ngang' a mbambi* (see page 223) of one thousand strings of blue pipe beads and a fowl, after recovery from an infectious disease by means of the fetish image belonging to this particular "doctor." In return for the fee special instruction is given in the "medicines" used, and method of procedure. If, however, the patient is clever enough to recognise the herbs, &c., given to him, and to imitate the ceremonies, he may set up as a "doctor" of this order without the payment of any fee.

By being imbued with fetish power in the *ekinu* dance. This is a fetish dance during which the "doctor" tries to drive into his patient or into his pupil the fetish power. For this particular dance see page 129.

By passing successfully the ordeal for witchcraft. In March 1909 I met a man who had formerly been a witch-finder (*ngang' a ngombo*). He had been accused four times of being a witch, and each time he had vomited after drinking the ordeal infusion, thus proving his innocence. After the fourth ordeal he informed his friends that he himself would begin business as a witch-finder; and he became in much request, and was never again himself accused. On one occasion he was chased by an accused person who threatened to shoot him; but his principal professional difficulty was to find unerringly the grave of the person killed by a witch. If death is believed to be due to witchcraft, no trace is left of the grave, and the pointing out of the place of interment is regarded as the crucial test of the occult powers of this kind of witch-doctor.

The profession is therefore open to any shrewd, artful, and energetic person, either rich or poor, bond or free, and is not confined to either sex. As a rule, the witch-doctor is a lithe and active person, for it is often necessary to dance for hours to excite the crowd to the required pitch; he has restless, sharp eyes that jump from face to face of the spectators; he has an acute knowledge of human nature, and knows almost instinctively what will please the surrounding throng of on-



*Lent by*

#### WITCH-DOCTOR AND HIS ASSISTANTS

*Miss Hartland*

The witch-doctor himself is weirdly decorated with charms, skins, feathers, and chalk. One assistant has a rattle, and the other a small ivory trumpet, and to the sound of these instruments the witch-doctor dances when in search of the witch responsible for the illness of his client, or the death of a person.



lookers; but his face becomes after a time ugly, repulsive, and the canvas upon which cruelty, chicanery, hatred, and all devilish passions are portrayed with repellent accuracy.

When performing, blue, red, white, yellow, and any other colour he can procure are plastered in patches, lines, and circles upon his face and the other exposed parts of his body; thick circles of white surround the eyes, a patch of red across the forehead, broad stripes of yellow are drawn down the cheeks, bands of red, white, or yellow run down the arms and across the chest, and spots of blue and other colours are put on promiscuously to fill up, according to no rule other than his own crude taste, and the colours available. His dress consists of the softened skins of wild animals, either whole or in strips, feathers of birds, dried fibres and leaves, ornaments of leopard, crocodile, or rat's teeth, small tinkling bells, rattling seedpods, and anything else that is unusual and wearable. The effect attained is extremely grotesque, but to the native these things are the proper paraphernalia of a witch-doctor and a sign of his power. To inspire the native with awe and fear this get-up is absolutely necessary, for, if a witch-doctor arrived at the scene of his operations in the ordinary garb of a native, he would be scouted and turned out of the town.

The witch-doctor is the arbiter of life and death, for not only is the victim he selects led away to drink the ordeal, but so implicitly do the people believe in him that, when he says that his patient will die, this invariably happens, as the friends begin at once to prepare for the funeral, and instead of feeding the patient they dig his grave and send to call his relatives to the obsequies. The medicine-man has said that he will die, so what is the use of wasting time and good food on him?

The witch-doctor is consulted about a child before birth, at birth, and throughout its childhood and youth, during illness to drive away the evil spirits causing the sickness, after the death of a first wife to purify the widower, after death to discover the witch who caused it, and at burial to ensure that the deceased will not return to trouble the family. Even after death and burial the spirit of the departed one can be controlled

by the medicine-man, and destroyed by him if it does not behave itself decently.

The witch-doctor puts the native under taboo, and removes it at the proper time; he makes the hunting, trading, and war "medicine" to ensure good luck; he brings the rain when there is a drought, or stops it when the fields are being inundated with abnormal storms; he makes the fetish for the caravan to carry on the road that will soften the heart of the white trader, so that he will give a good price for the produce offered for sale; he also makes the charms that will protect a whole town, or an individual, or an animal. There is no condition of life that he is unable to affect either for good or evil, and his services must not be despised or some dread catastrophe will follow. Such are the pretensions of the Congo witch-doctor, and over the natives he wields tyrannical power.

There are two terms that contain the whole theory and practice of the Lower Congo medicine-man's black and white art. When a man has been injured by a known or unknown enemy and wishes to inflict on him disease, misfortune, or death, he selects a medicine-man who possesses a fetish that has control over certain diseases, and pays him a fee to *loka e nkisi*, i.e. to curse anyone by the aid of a charm or fetish. The fetish is beaten with a stick, raised in the air three times, and held head downwards three times near the ground, told what to do, and then hung up outside the invoker's house, and the spirit of the fetish flies off to obey its orders. This is the simple *modus operandi* followed by all medicine-men, who invoke their fetishes to use their various powers against the enemies of their customers. Any ordinary man who owns a fetish can curse an enemy with it by performing the same ceremony; and if a man has not a fetish of his own powerful enough to satisfy his hatred, and does not want the expense of engaging a medicine-man, he can, for a small sum, borrow for a short time a strong fetish, and with it curse his enemy. When this ceremony is performed, it is not necessary to mention a name, but simply "the thief who stole my goods," or "my enemy who sent me bad luck," or "the one who bewitches me with this bad disease," as the case



may be; and this is the whole science of the Congo medicine-man's "black art."

Nearly all diseases, bad luck, misfortune, sorrow, and death are caused by witchcraft, *i.e.* by some one using a fetish to curse (*loka e nkisi*) a person or a member of his, or her, family. For example, if a piece of cloth is stolen, the owner pays a medicine-man to curse the unknown thief. Should the thief hear of it, and through fear of the curse return the cloth, he will pay the owner compensation, and will ask the medicine-man to soothe or appease the fetish, and thus remove its curse (*lembola e nkisi*) from working against him. Suppose the thief does not hear that the robbed man has paid a witch-doctor to curse him, or he hears of it, but feels so secure in his disbelief in fetishes, or has such faith in the protective power of his own charm, that he retains the cloth, then the spell will work either against him, or against one of his family. Hence when a man is suffering from a disease, no one knows whether that disease is the result of a curse invoked on his own evil doings, or on a member of his family, who has injured some one so badly that they have paid to have the curse invoked that has brought the disease.

A robbed man will sometimes fee the "lion doctor" (p. 227 *infra*) to curse the unknown thief with severe lung trouble; by and by a man in the neighbourhood is troubled with a chest complaint, and, all other remedies failing, he asks the "lion doctor" to use his good offices with the "lion" fetish to appease and soothe it so that the curse may be removed, and he may be cured. From the native point of view it is evident that either the sick man himself, or else one of his family, is the thief, or why does the man suffer from such a complaint? The same medicine-man practises his black magic to invoke his fetish (*loka e nkisi*) to curse a man with a disease, and he uses his white magic to soothe his fetish (*lembola e nkisi*) to remove the curse, *i.e.* cure the man; and he thus draws pay from both parties. Hence to invoke malignant powers against an enemy, and to soothe and appease the said powers on behalf of a client by various rites and ceremonies so that they will remove the

curse, are the opposite arts of the same medicine man, and he employs the same fetish for both purposes.

Some of the medicine-men in the following list are common to the whole of the Lower Congo, others are known only in certain localities, and others are known by one name in one district, and another title in another part of the country. It will be observed that some are apparently more beneficent than malignant in their operations, but it may be stated as an axiom that the more malignant a medicine-man can be for evil, the more beneficent and powerful he can be in removing curses and thus curing diseases. The powerful fetishes that give the worst complaints are also supposed to be able to cure them when properly appeased by rites and ceremonies.

One of the most popular medicine-men is he who goes by the name of *ngang'* a *zumbi*—the luck-giving medicine-man. Should a town desire to have good luck in health, in trading, in breeding animals, and success in its rivalry with other towns in hunting, farming, &c., the inhabitants contribute towards feeing a luck-giving medicine-man to make for them a strong town charm (*nkind' a evata*). On the arrival of the medicine-man with his bag of charms, a plain post of a certain kind of wood (*lembanzau*) is procured, and a hole is cut in the top. Into this hole some of the *zumbi* charm is put, and a piece of palm gossamer is tied over it. A hole is then dug in the ground just outside the town by the side of the road which the women pass when fetching water from the stream. A goat is killed, and its head is put in the hole and the fetish stick is placed on it, as it is supposed to preserve the stick from the attacks of the white ant. The earth is rammed tightly round the stick, and the goat's blood is poured over the hole in the stick, thus bathing the charms in blood. The town charm is now complete and ready to work, but there is one prohibition that must be scrupulously observed—nothing tied in a bundle may enter the town, or the charm will become non-effective. Women returning with fire-wood must untie the bundle before reaching the "town charm"; men with bundles of grass for thatching must unfasten them; carriers with loads must loosen

the cords, or make a wide detour; and people must remove their girdles or belt. No sacrifice is offered regularly to this charm, but, should some misfortune happen to the town or people, they refresh or renew the energies of the charm by pouring some more blood over it. Sometimes the fetish post is placed in the centre of the town.

A man will invest, sometimes, in a *zumbi* charm for his own exclusive use. The fee, however, is so extravagantly large that only rich men can pay it, and hence the idea of its power to bring riches to its owner is fostered. The *zumbi* charm is at times put into a fowl, a goat, or a pig, and such a fowl or animal is never sold or killed, and it is never stolen, as no one will dare to steal the fetish belonging to another person. Male animals only are invested with this *zumbi* power, and when the animal grows old the power is transferred to another.

There is to be found in the towns what are called *zumbi* fowls (*nsusu a zumbi*); and the possessor of such a charm selects a fine healthy cock and gives it a portion of the *zumbi* charm to swallow. That fowl then becomes his fetish, and he treats it as such. No one is allowed to beat it, or offend it by driving it away, and it is respected like a chief. The *zumbi* fowl tells its owner of coming events, such as danger to the town or to himself, and by its crow it also foretells the future; and in that way brings luck to its owner, as only he can understand the information given by its crow, and is thus able to take advantage of it. When the fowl becomes old the *zumbi* charm is given to another, and the first one is killed and eaten by its owner. Drums and rattles are used for driving the *zumbi* power into a person, but the fowl simply swallows a piece of the charm.

The *zumbi* is a bundle of charms, or an image into which some of the charms have been put, or a fowl, or animal as indicated above. The power of this charm is derived from the great *mpungu* charm; and the fowl of *zumbi*, fowl of the image (*sole*), and the fowl of the *mpungu* are all the same in their operations, getting their powers, however, originally from the last—*mpungu*=all-powerful, mighty.

Another very powerful medicine-man is he of the *nzaji*

(*ngang' a nzaji*) fetish. Thunder is supposed to be made by this fetish, which also has the lightning under its control; and both lightning and a thunderbolt are known by the name of the "dog of the *nzaji*" (*mbw' a nzaji*). This fetish is represented by an image, and is believed to have tremendous power. When a person has been robbed, and cannot discover the thief, he sends for the medicine-man of this particular cult, who brings his wooden image, and asks each suspected person if he or she has stolen the article. If they all deny the theft, he then goes outside the house and taps several times on the stomach of the image, and after raising it and lowering it three times, the *nzaji* is thus incited to strike the thief with lightning on the first possible opportunity.

The fear of this curse is so great that a thief will return the stolen article, secretly if possible, or openly rather than risk so terrible a punishment. The *nzaji* curse is then nullified in the following way: the person or family under the ban tells the medicine-man to bring his image, and he pours some palm wine into the hole in the stomach of the image, stirs the wine well, and gives it to the person or persons to drink. This drinking of the mixture (*nua mbozo*) renders the participants immune from death by lightning, and from a skin disease called the fire of God (*tiya twa Nzambi*), which is supposed to be given by this fetish to those who are under its ban.

Should several members of a family die either by lightning or become affected by the skin disease, the family goes through the ceremony of marrying the *nzaji* fetish into the family, or one of its members becomes a fetish-man of this cult, and thus the whole family comes under the benign influence or protection of the *nzaji* (this is called *tuntuka nzaji*). It is believed that if the fetish is brought into close kinship or intimate relationship by one or other of these ceremonies, that it will have pity on its family, and no other member will suffer from its curse. It must be remembered that, when the *nzaji* curse is put on a thief, the thief's family is included in that curse; and if the family has a strong suspicion that one of its members is the thief, they try to protect themselves in the above





*Photo*

### THE NLONGO CUSTOM, ZOMBO

*Rev. T. Lewis*

The Zombos during circumcision live for many months isolated in "lodges," but periodically they put on these masks and visit the villages and markets, where they frighten the women into giving them food and money. It is one method of supporting themselves while in the "lodges."

See page 175





manner, and undoubtedly the thief often protects himself by taking advantage of the antidote to the curse.

The fetish-man of another cult (*ngang' a mbambi*) owns an image that gives and cures deep-seated ulcers (*mbad*). Some time ago a man living in a town near San Salvador had some of these ulcers which the medicine-men could not heal although many were engaged for that purpose. They said that they were caused by the *mbambi* fetish, and to cure the man it was necessary to marry the fetish into the sick man's family, when it would take pity on him. The fetish-man of this particular cult was sent for, and on arrival he placed his drum in the centre of the crowd that had collected in the middle of the town. A boy and girl were selected to represent the family. The girl was put on the ground with her back supported by the drum, and the fetish man beat away at his drum until the girl swayed to and fro with the rhythm of the beating: then, of a sudden, she jumped up and ran to a house opposite, climbed over it, and as she went, pulled out, in her frenzy, handfuls of grass. Her actions showed that she was under the spell of the fetish, which had taken possession of her. The same operation was repeated on the boy,<sup>1</sup> but, being too young to know what was expected of him, he sat stolidly still, and at last was replaced by an older boy, who very quickly re-enacted the girl's performances. The *mbambi* fetish was then regarded as a member of the clan, and was expected to withdraw his displeasure from his "relative." The patient, however, was never cured of his disease, and died a short time after the above ceremony.

There are evil spirits (*nkwiya*) that cause diseases, bad luck, and death, therefore it is necessary to have a fetish-man (*ngang' a nkwiya*) who can control, punish and even destroy them should there be occasion to do so: for the evil spirit (*nkwiya*) is that by which the witch (*ndoki*) is possessed. It is the business of the medicine-man of this cult to ascertain what spirit it is that is troubling the sick man or the unfortunate family, and then he tries to drive it away by cursing, threaten-

<sup>1</sup> This boy, now a man, related this incident to me.

ing, and firing his gun at it, and, as a last resort, he digs up the body of the deceased person whose evil spirit is accused of being the cause of the illness or epidemic and burns it.<sup>1</sup> By burning the body it is believed that the spirit is effectually destroyed, but this is done only when the evil spirit of the person is persistent in its attacks on the health and comfort of the individual or family. Before employing such extreme measures they will often call in a fetish-man of another class (*ngang' a bitodi*), who calls on the spirits, and tries to persuade or exhort them to leave the sick man alone. Sometimes he will chase the said spirits out of the town, and, getting them near the bush, he will fire his gun repeatedly at them to drive them away. Being something of a ventriloquist, he has the trick of throwing his voice in different directions, answering himself in assumed tones, and keeping up conversations with the evil spirits; and, as the natives hear these different voices talking in mumbling sentences, they think this medicine-man is well worth his fee.

Chest and lung complaints are very common, so they have a medicine-man (*ngang' a munkanda*) of the traps to deal with them. He has a bundle of charms and some small traps. The bundle contains powdered chalk, palm nuts, and small garden eggs, and on the outside are various leaves, herbs, and six small traps. If the person suffering from a chest complaint spits blood, the medicine-man takes some leaves and some chalk powder, crushes them together, and after adding a little palm wine, he gives the mixture to his patient to drink. Then he puts several of the traps (*nkanda*) about the door of the sick person's house, or room, having first put a little fowl's blood or some sweet herbs in them to attract insects, spiders, cockroaches, &c.

In the morning he looks to see if anything has entered the traps, and if he finds a cockroach is right at the end of one of them, he knows that the witch belongs to a distant branch of the family, and without any compunction he crushes the cockroach, believing that the sickness will now pass from his patient to the witch represented by the cockroach, and his patient will

<sup>1</sup> See p. 243 for other methods of dealing with the spirits of the dead.

now get better. If, however, the cockroach is only half way up the trap, he knows the witch is of very near kinship to his patient, and, as he does not want to pass the sickness on to a near relative, he warns the cockroach and lets it go. Should a cockroach be found in the trap next morning, he believes it is the same one (or, if it is a spider, that it has only changed its form); he will either warn it and threaten it more strongly and let it go, or he will keep it shut up a few days without food, and will watch to see if a near relative of the patient becomes thin (*i.e.* dying through having his soul so imprisoned in the trap that it cannot return to the body), and, if no one becomes thin and ill, he will vehemently threaten the witch in the insect and let it go. Should he find an insect in the trap on the third morning, he kills it at once, as it is evident that the witch is very persistent and should be punished. It is immaterial if the insect is found in a different trap each time.

When the medicine-man squeezes the insect in the trap, someone else gets the illness of the patient, and, as this is the only way to catch this complaint, it is evident that the first patient received it by trying to bewitch some one else. This is supposed to be the only way in which this lung trouble is imparted and cured. It is interesting to note that witches can travel about disguised as insects, and that the folk they represent suffer in proportion to the suffering inflicted on the insects. In this fetish-man we have the black and white art operating at one and the same time—in curing and giving a complaint.

The most powerful and most feared of all the fetishes in the catalogue belongs to the medicine-man who has the *mbanzangola* fetish. It is a wooden image, and is always retained in the possession of the witch-doctor, as it is too powerful to pass into the hands of a layman. A private person can buy other fetishes, but no private individual may own a *mbanzangola* fetish. If a person desires to cause pain, disease, or death to another, he goes to a medicine-man of this fetish order, and, having paid a fee, he drives in a nail or knife where he wants his enemy to feel the pain. A knife-stab in a vital part means a painful death to the man's enemy; a

nail in the shoulder, elbow, or knee means excruciating agony in one or other of those joints, and indicates that the man does not want to kill his enemy, but only wishes him to have rheumatism, abscesses, or such minor ailments. These fetish images are often found stuck over with nails, knives, and other sharp instruments. This is probably the only fetish image in connection with which there is no "white art" practised—it is neither a protective fetish nor a curative one, but is always used to inflict pain. On the other hand, I have heard that the nails, &c., driven into this image are offerings for benefits received; and it is possible that someone suffering from pain in a part of his body has driven in a nail in a corresponding part of the image, to pass on the pain to an enemy whom he may think sent it to him, hence he may regard such a nail as an offering for a benefit he hoped to receive.

Dropsy of the stomach is to be found occasionally, and a person suffering from such a complaint sends for the medicine-man of the *masaku* cult, who on his arrival calls together the relatives of his patient, and to some of them he gives light branches, to others rattles, and to one of them the fetish image *masaku*. The fetish-man puts the drum by the side of his patient, and while he is playing it, the relative who has the image beats it and calls on it to cure the patient, and punish those who are causing the disease by their witchcraft; those with the rattles shake them vigorously, and those with the branches beat the body of the sick man. After keeping up this performance for some time, the medicine-man leads them outside the town, and the branches are all heaped together and left. He then procures some sweet-smelling herbs and boils them in a large pot, which is put under the patient; a large blanket is put over the man and the saucepan, and thus the sick man takes a vapour bath and perspires freely. This process is repeated many times.

The word *lemba* means to tame, soothe, make gentle, and the fetish-man of this order (*ngang' a lembe*) is called upon to ratify unconditional peace between towns and chiefs that have been at war (see chapter on Warfare). If a man has accidentally killed another, he has to pay compensation to the family of the



deceased; and then the homicide is taken to this kind of medicine-man, who procures a saucepan of palm wine and presses into it the juice of certain stems and leaves. He then dips his hands into the mixture, and puts the palms of his wet hands to the forehead and back of the homicide's head, then to his temples, and lastly on all the joints of his body. This makes the homicide gentle and careful (*olembamene*). Should a hunter happen to kill his dog, he must go to this medicine-man and pass through this ceremony, or next time he will kill a man. No one will hunt with him unless he observes this rite.

The medicine-man also treats any cases of madness. The patient is well tied with ropes and taken to him carrying a lighted stick and a fowl on his head. The medicine-man takes five branches of five different trees, dips them in water, and repeatedly strikes the patient with them, saying, "Evil spirit, come out of him" (*nkwiya vaika muna yandi*). He then takes the lighted stick from the head of the insane person, and plunges it in water, and as the fire goes out so the bad spirit goes out of the man. Thereupon the fetish-man cuts the ropes and hands the madman back to his family. When a madman "runs amok" his family are told, and if they do not fetch him and look after him properly he is killed; but in the old days it was usual to kill quickly a hopelessly insane person. The fetish man who treats such cases as these is called *ngang' a mbuji*=madness.

We have already given one method of dealing with chest complaints (page 224), but there is another medicine-man (*ngang' a nkosi*=lion) who has the reputation of curing the more severe forms of lung complaints, such as pleurisy, pneumonia, &c., and a person suffering from a disease of this kind goes to, or sends for, a doctor of this class, who cuts a long, thin, exposed rootlet of a tree, and binds it tightly round the patient's chest. The "doctor" then searches for a bunch of palm-nuts on a palm tree that has never been cut before for palm-nuts, and, having found the first-fruits of the palm tree, he takes some of the nuts and tears the oily fibre off with his teeth—a knife must not be used—meanwhile walking round the palm tree. Two of the nuts, freed of their oily fibre, are

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hung from the rootlet round the man's chest, one near each breast, and then the oil from the fibre is pressed out, mixed with palm wine, and rubbed well into the patient's chest.

There are many cases of sleeping-sickness; and the patient suffering from this terrible complaint goes to the medicine-man for sleeping-sickness (*ngang' a manimba*), who gives him a purge, and then something hot to drink with pepper mixed in it. Sometimes he drops pepper-juice in the patient's eyes to keep him awake, and lets blood every four days. He also scarifies the back and legs, and rubs in a mixture of limejuice and gunpowder, and stands the patient for a short time in the sun. Very often a low state of health exhibits some of the symptoms of sleeping-sickness, and such cases are helped by any course of medicine in which the sufferer has faith, and these so-called cures foster the belief of the people in the power of this kind of "doctor" to relieve and cure real cases of sleeping-sickness. Although I have watched carefully I have never known him to cure a patient who, beyond all doubt, had the dread complaint.

When a married couple have lost their children by death they send for the *manga* fetish-man, and on his arrival, the woman holds a "hand" of plantain on her head with the right hand, and to her left hand a rope is tied, and she is led by a man who cries out, "I have a person for sale." The fetish-man says, "Bring the woman here and I will buy her that she may bear children." The seller demands 3,000 strings of beads, and the medicine-man pays three single beads, and takes the woman, whereupon he throws away the plantain, saying, "Remove these plantains, for they are the reason why she does not bear healthy children, because she is carrying them on her head." He cuts the rope and a feast is made, after which he puts a taboo on her, and the ceremony is finished. This *manga* fetish-man does for the people in the Ngombe Lutete district what the *moko* "doctor" practises around San Salvador (see page 259).

The medicine-man who owns the *mpongo* fetish prepares in saucepans some protective charms which work by making an enemy forget his evil intentions. Should a person want to rob



*Photo by*

# SLEEPING-SICK PATIENTS, SAN SALVADOR

*Dr. Mercier Gamble*

The patients are set to build their own house, where they live while under treatment. The picture well illustrates the materials, and the methods, of erecting an ordinary native house.



*Photo by*

# BASKET MAKING

*Dr. Mercier Gamble*

The Congo women are skilful basket makers. They prepare their own materials, and often work designs in red and black. These, like the above house builders, are sleeping-sick patients. It is always wise to keep such patients busy.



another under his very eyes, he uses the charm prepared and sold by this medicine-man, and under its spell he enters a person's house, and either he or an accomplice engages the victim in an interesting conversation, so that he becomes forgetful of all else, and in that state of oblivion he is easily robbed.

Any person suffering through ill-health from lack of energy sends for the *nkonzo* (=nervous energy) medicine-man, or for the *malunga* (=smithy, forge) medicine-man, who rubs two pieces of iron down the legs and arms three times; he then takes some green grass and rubs it into shreds, and puts some fire in the middle, and some sweet herbs on the live embers. He blows on it until there is a good smoke, and then passes the smoking herbs three times round the legs of the patient as he, or she, stands astride. When a woman is in birthpangs and has not sufficient strength, they seat her on two stones and perform the above operation. This fetish comes from the smithy, and consequently no one will steal from a forge or he will lose his nervous energy.

The medicine-man with the *ngundu* fetish attempts to cure hernia with fomentations of hot leaves, purgatives, and palm wine mixed with certain juices. The *ngobila* medicine-man possesses an image that has power to discover thieves, and recover stolen property. It gives the thieves any and every kind of lung trouble, from which they cannot be cured until they have made restitution for the robbery. And the *ebunze* medicine-man attends a person with fits, apoplexy, or the ague shivers of fevers. He makes a leaf funnel and squeezing the juices of certain leaves into it, he drops the mixture into the eyes. The *maninga* medicine-man owns a fetish that causes a man to become very thin and weak, and it is also supposed to cure the complaint.

The rain-stopping medicine-man (*ngang' a lukandu*) has a small bundle of "medicines" (which bundle is called *lukandu*), which he places on the ground and surrounds with several small heaps of gunpowder. He shakes his rattle, explodes the powder, and blows his whistle three times, and then the rain will neither be so frequent nor so abundant. The rainbow is one of the signs of the effective working of this medicine-man; and when the people see it they think the charm is successful,



and the rain will not fall again for some time. Should these means, however, not succeed, *salt is put on the fire*; but this last charm must be used with great care, for it may entirely stop the rain for the rest of the rainy season, so it is used only when other means have failed. The medicine-man, on the day that he is going to invoke the power of this charm, must neither drink water nor wash himself. To cause rain to come after a long drought, the fetish-man takes certain leaves (*lulemba-lemba*), and puts them into a stream and dives under the water, and when he returns to the surface the rain will soon fall.

In the ceremony of the last medicine-man that we shall mention there is an echo of the old Scottish belief that spirits, &c., will not cross water, as illustrated in Burns' *Tam o' Shanter*. This medicine-man (*ngang' a maladi*), when a person has recovered from certain serious sicknesses, as dropsy, sleeping-sickness, &c., brings his fetish, which originally came from the Baladi country (in French Congo), and removes from the patient the taboo of "not crossing the road" that was imposed on the sick man while ill. He takes his patient to a cross road, draws a chalk mark on the road, digs a trench, puts water into it, and he takes the patient, by interlocking the little fingers of the right hands, and helps him over the water three times. The taboo is removed, and the sickness is not able to follow the man across the water. Should a woman give birth to sickly children that quickly die, the same ceremony is performed, and the complaint from which she was suffering that caused the death of her children will not follow her across the little stream of running water.

It will be observed that in this list of medicine-men, and from those mentioned in the various chapters dealing with other aspects of native life, that there is a fetish-man for every known disease, and also one for every possible emergency of life. The native is afraid to take a single important step in any direction from birth to death without first consulting the medicine-men, and invoking the aid of their fetishes. When a man is not helped by one, he, as a rule, does not blame him, but thinks that the diagnosis is wrong, and that the disease, or misfortune, is not under the control of his particular fetish. His faith, however, in the medicine-men is unaffected, so he

simply changes one fetish-man for another, hoping that the new one will have a fetish to meet his case.

It will be observed that in the ceremonies of some fetish-men white magic is more evident than black, and in others that black magic is more prominent than white, and that nearly every one practises both the black and white art by the invocation of the same fetish in a slightly different way; by dealing with his fetish in one way he invokes it to curse a person with disease and misfortune, and by following another mode of procedure he tries to soothe and appease his fetish, that it may in a good humour give his client the health and good luck that he desires.

In the early years of the Baptist Mission on the Congo, the natives had little or no faith in our medicines, because we administered them in a simple and straight-forward way. If we had had recourse to trickery we might have made large sums for our mission funds, but, although our medical knowledge was very limited, and we had no doctors for very long among us, yet our remedies have so gained in favour that at one station alone (Wathen) a sum of nearly £30 is taken annually for medicines, and natives come long distances to be treated in our hospitals. Medicine is not given to those whom we know can afford to pay for it.

The fetish-men have largely maintained the continuity of native customs, for, when baffled in curing a person, they have frequently put their failure at the door of a broken taboo, or a slighted "country custom"; they are also largely responsible for crushing any inventive genius the people have shown by putting public calamities, such as an epidemic of sickness, to the account of any inventor who might be known at the time; and they have hindered all progress by charging with witchcraft anyone who was more skilful in work, or more energetic and shrewd in trading, than his neighbours. The fear of being charged with witchcraft has been so great and continuous that it has hampered and destroyed every attempt at advancement, and nullified every progressive step, and there was little hope of the native attaining any position in civilisation, or any betterment of his conditions of life, until he lost faith in his fetish-men.

## CHAPTER XXI

### FETISHES AND CHARMS

NOT many years ago the belief in fetishes, charms, and amulets was widespread throughout the whole of the Lower Congo. Everyone had his or her charm worn somewhere about the body, or carefully guarded in basket or box, or hanging from a rafter of the house; and some had several charms for various purposes. Many of the more wealthy had their special charms and fetish images, for which they paid large sums, to which they offered periodic sacrifices, and by which they were supposed to have gained their wealth, and their favourable positions in the localities in which they lived. In many large districts these charms no longer possess their former power to influence the life and thought of all the people, or even the majority; but the Lower Congo, *i.e.* the country between Stanley Pool and the sea coast, is so immense, that there are still large areas untouched by white men, where faith in fetishes and charms which, a generation ago, was common to the whole country, continues to linger, and will for many a day to come; and in the districts where the white man and his teaching are dominant factors in the life of the natives, there are some who still cling to their charms and believe in their power. A superstitious belief in charms, amulets, mascots, &c., is most difficult to eradicate: it is hydra-headed in its virility and numerous manifestations.

Every medicine-man has a bundle of charms (*ebunda dia mfula*), which by some is kept intact, but most of them put a portion of this charm bundle into an image (*teke*), and the image having received a bit of all the charms in the bundle into its head or stomach, it (the portion of charms) becomes the brains, the intelligence (*nkinda*) of the image which is thus transformed into a fetish (*nkisi*). Each medicine-man has his

own special mixture of charms which he puts into his own image, which he calls by a name that distinguishes his particular cult from those of all other medicine-men, and the name by which his order and his fetish are known indicates the diseases, &c., which he is supposed to control. In a large district there may be one, two, or more members of each order of witch-doctors operating.

The word *nkisi* means an image, a horn, a shell, and in fact it is a generic term applied to anything into which a medicine-man has put a little bit of every charm in his bundle; and it is not an effective *nkisi* until it has passed through his hands. He uses certain ceremonies, and incantations, and an article that could formerly be kicked from place to place becomes a powerful fetish, that can protect a pig, a man, a caravan of traders, or a whole village; and as these medicine-men are well paid for making them, a large part of their wealth is derived from manufacturing them. A wooden image that may be bought for a yard or two of common calico, can be made into a strong fetish that will cost the buyer forty or fifty yards, or even the price of a slave.

The charms in the bundles are composed of such articles as those among which the spirits delight to live, or upon which they like to feed; portions of the charms from the bundles, with the same object of pleasing the spirit, are put into images, horns, &c., so as to induce the spirits to enter and abide in them, and thus come under the control of the witch-doctor who owns the bundle or image, and be obedient to his behests; and the buyer of a strong fetish is supposed to have a similar controlling power over the spirit that it pleases.

The witch-doctor of every fetish cult can give and cure a disease, or ensure certain good or bad luck, hence there are as many witch-doctors with their fetishes as there are spirits to be appeased and controlled; and when a new disease appears, or a new calamity is to be averted, a new cult of witch-doctors comes into existence, with new fetish power to control the spirit that is responsible for it. Sometimes a witch-doctor will come forward with a fetish of such pretensions that he claims to

supersede all other cults and their fetishes, and render the exercise of their powers unnecessary; but their day is as brief as their arrogant pretensions are great, and as the fraud is quickly discovered they soon pass into oblivion, leaving the older and less pretentious orders more firmly established than ever: *e.g.* some few years ago a witch-doctor visited the towns round San Salvador with a new power, called the "divine fetish" (*nkisi a kiniambe*), and promised that all who confessed their witchcraft, *i.e.* all the evil they had in their hearts against anyone, and paid him to perform certain rites, should never die. He and his assistants reaped a rich harvest for a short time, but when their clients died like others, the bubble burst, and that particular cult and its fetish dropped into disfavour and neglect.

Here are the contents of a charm bundle opened by my friend, the late Dr. Bentley; "It is an open bag, 7 × 4 in., with shoulder-straps, cleverly made of cotton, and appears to be a succession of button-hole stitching, one row on another; it is like close crochet-work. There is a neat zigzag pattern on it, and the bag is quite a work of art. It has been often smeared with blood, and there are one or two mud-like patches on it of chewed kola-nut. What with blood and kola-nut, it is a filthy article. A monkey's tail is attached to it. Inside is a bundle wrapped in palm-fibre cloth. We draw it out carefully, for it is full of a pungent white aromatic powder. After sneezing and coughing, we proceed with our examination. The powder is dry pipe-clay mixed with pepper. There is found in it a small goat's horn, stuffed with pipe-clay, in which a small brown nut shines. The point of the horn is bored, and three loom-knots of palm-fibre hang as a tassel. Next, some feathers from the breast and wing of a guinea-fowl; two small bags and cuttings of leopard skin, a small dried chameleon, some wing-cases of a stag beetle, a small antelope's horn, some *Musa* nuts, some trefoil coils of cane, a palm thorn, some beads, chips of ironstone, a scarab beetle, two tiny round pebbles, and a blue Jaquirity bean. The powder and 'mysteries' would fill a tumbler."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Pioneering on the Congo*, by W. H. Bentley, p. 257. Religious Tract Society, 1900.



The *nkisi* (fetishes, charms) are made to meet every conceivable contingency. They have them for making a thief invisible so that he may steal with impunity, and also for detecting such thieves; for procuring the advantage in trading transactions; for making children obedient, and dogs faithful and good hunters; for guarding a farm, and helping a person secretly to rob a farm; for aiding one to kill his enemy, at the same time protecting him from his murderous assaults; for giving children, or keeping a person from having a child: for preserving a person on the road, the river, or in the town, as well as to bring bad luck to others on their journeys; for making a gun fire straight, and the guns of others aim crookedly. There is no good wish a native may have for his own advantage, but what he can buy a *nkisi* to aid him in its attainment, and there is no evil desire that he may have for the misfortune, sickness, and death of his neighbours, foes, and relatives but what he can procure a *nkisi* to accomplish them.

If a *nkisi* fails to perform its office, it must either have a sacrifice offered to it, or have its power renewed by the witch-doctor who first made it, or by a member of the same cult, *i.e.* it is either sulky because it has been neglected, or it is weak from loss of power. The sacrifice removes the sulkiness and restores it to good humour, and the witch-doctor restores its power. When it is desirable to wake up a *nkisi*, it is beaten with a stick, then put on the ground and surrounded by several small heaps of gunpowder which are exploded, a whistle is blown vigorously, and the *nkisi* is held over the smoke, and thus becomes alert to perform its particular functions.

I do not think that there is any idea of worship when a sacrifice (*kimenga*) is made to a fetish, and certainly no prayers are offered with the sacrifice. The root idea is that in some way the sacrifice renews the power in the fetish image, or bundle of charms. It refreshes the fetish, and enables it to perform more effectively its office of protector of its owner, punisher of his enemies, and imparter of good fortune. A fowl or a goat is killed, and its blood is poured over the image or charm; for these sacrifices are made not only to images,

but also to bundles of charms. Sometimes the toe of a fowl is cut and the blood is allowed to fall on the fetish, and even the toe of a frog is cut, and used as a sacrifice. If the fetish is to be kept up to its full power, the sacrifice should be made regularly, *e.g.* at every new moon, or on certain market days, and the larger the favours expected the more costly must be the sacrifice. The fetish receiving only the drippings from a fowl's or a frog's toe cannot be expected to confer large favours. At the same time some *nkisi* can only impart small favours, and consequently it would be waste to give them large sacrifices, such as a fowl or goat. Other fetishes, owned by wealthy men, give great good fortune, and their rich owners can afford to offer goats and fowl and expect large favours in return. The flesh of a sacrifice must not be sold, but eaten by the man who offers it and the members of his clan. Sunset is the usual time for offering the sacrifice, and the person who kills and offers it turns his face towards the sun. A pig is never offered as a sacrifice, although they are more plentiful than goats. My informants could not guess the reason for this restriction; but I think it is probably reckoned unclean, for the planter of the pumpkin seeds is not allowed to eat it, just before and during the season for planting them.

The following is a list of their fetishes, charms, and amulets; and in drawing up the catalogue I shall avoid as much as possible repeating what has been written on the subject in the chapter on Black and White Magic—in that chapter you have the operators, and in this, the tools, or means by which they are supposed to do their work. Or it may be stated in another way: that these are the names of the spirits that like to dwell and feed on the ingredients put into these fetishes and charms and thus come under the control of the persons owning the fetishes, each of which possess their names. The fact that there may be in use simultaneously 1,000 charms of one particular name, as there are many fetish-men of each cult living in different parts of the country, should be no difficulty in accepting this suggestion, for the spirits may be either ubiquitous, or there may be a large number of each order of spirits.

The *mpungu* bundle contains pieces of the skins of every strong animal obtainable, and some albino's hair, which is supposed to be a very powerful charm. As this bundle is rather awkward to carry about, pieces of all the contents of the charm bundle are put into a hole in the head of an image, which then becomes a *sole* fetish, able to make its possessor acceptable to people with whom he comes into contact, either as traveller, trader, master, or lover. A person whom we regard as the special protégé of Dame Fortune, they think has a *sole* fetish. The price of one of the fetishes is a slave, and a goat must be sacrificed to it every new moon. The animal is held over the image, its throat is cut, and the blood is allowed to flow over the fetish.

There is an image that goes by the name of *nzaji* that causes the lightning, and strikes with lightning those who have offended its clients. It also imparts and cures skin diseases (see page 221); but the most usual purpose to which it is put is to tame slaves and bind them to their masters. A little palm wine is put into a hole in the stomach of the image, and mixed with herbal charms; then the slaves are brought, and each gives a promise not to run away, or leave his or her master under any circumstances without permission. They each drink a little palm wine that has been mixed in the fetish image, and after that they will not dare to escape for fear of being struck by lightning, or being infected with a terrible skin disease.

When a person wants to steal he takes an *ebunze* fetish image, and placing it on the ground, he makes four small heaps of gunpowder round it, and says, "Close So-and-so's eyes that he may not see, and his mind that he may not know." Then he explodes the powder, whistles with a small horn, and starts on his stealing expedition, believing that he will not be detected. Nevertheless, he uses all his cunning to avoid being seen. This fetish is used to steal from white and black alike, either by direct robbery, or causing the victim to pay twice for the same article. The word *ebunze* means a sickness something like apoplexy, and the medicine-man of the *ebunze* order gives and

cures this disease. It is most probable that a thief uses this kind of fetish for his purpose, that his victim may become helpless to guard his property, or recognise the thief. Another charm patronised by thieves is the *ebunge* bundle, which is supposed to render their actions invisible to the onlookers. Jugglers and witch-doctors employ it for the same purpose, that their methods of performing their tricks may not be observed by their patrons. It is also supposed to make the fighters in a war invulnerable through causing them to be invisible to the enemy. To counteract these charms, and to protect property, a pad (*munkata*) of old native cloth is twisted and placed on the article to be guarded, and the thief who then takes anything thus protected will suffer from swollen fingers.

The hairs of an albino are sold as very powerful charms, and will fetch fancy prices when they are scarce, as they enter largely into the ingredients of numerous charms; and if the witch-doctor who starts the secret society of the Country-of-the-dead cannot procure an albino to live in the lodge, he must have some of an albino's hair, or there will be no effective charm to induce his clients to join the society. An ordinary person always buries his hair cuttings and nail-parings, for if an enemy procures them he can make with them a powerful charm (called *nkisi* a *kindoki*) that will cause sickness or death to the person who formerly owned them. After the charm is made a few hairs and nail-parings are put in the food or drink, and death quickly follows.

A person who has swollen feet and arms, or a backache, goes to a man or woman who has been initiated into the great secret society of the Country-of-the-dead, and buys a special charm (*jeke*) made of black plantain seeds (*Strelitzia*), which are threaded on a string and tied round the affected part. But if an uninitiated person uses this charm without having bought it of a member of the secret society, instead of curing the complaint it will become worse. These seeds are mixed with, or put round, other charms to intensify their powers.

The *mpindi* image is carved with a large scrotal hernia (*mpiki*), which it causes in those who come under its malignant



spell. It is used as a charm to keep people from crossing a farm, and it is then represented by a hoe handle stuck in the ground, with some manioc cores in a piece of old basket tied to it. Any person crossing a farm thus protected will become subject to this complaint, but for obvious reasons women are not affected by this charm. For protecting fruit trees, farm produce, food left in the house, the signs of a curse (*kandu*) are used. Anything will answer the purpose, and it gives any kind of sickness to the thief who disregards it; *e.g.* a hoe handle stuck in the ground with some manioc cores tied to it will make the thief very thin and ill. A stick with colours daubed on it will cause the farm thief to have a large swelling (*goitre*) on the neck; or if the thief is a woman, and is *enceinte* at the time of stealing, her child will be badly formed. An old basket hung in a fruit tree, or against a door, will give backache to the thief, or cause him or her to become sterile. A stone hung in a little palm-basket with some creepers twisted round it, and suspended from a *nsafu* fruit tree, will give the person who steals from it, or even attempts to climb the tree, a severe form of hernia. If a person is called away from his meal, he will pretend to spit on it, and no one will dare to touch the food while he is away. These various things are not charms in themselves, but are tokens, or warnings (like "Trespassers will be Prosecuted") put up by the owners of the goods, to inform the thief that a curse is on those things, and what kind of complaint he will get if he risks the curse. They consider it unfair to put a curse on the stealing of an article and not indicate it in some way.

Horn charms seem to be used in three ways: (*a*) carried as ordinary amulets; (*b*) occasionally, or regularly, licked by the owner to give him the qualities of the animals and "medicines," portions of which have been rammed into it by the medicine-man; (*c*) the plug is removed, and the finger having been wetted and rubbed on the "medicine" in the horn, whatever adheres to it is smeared on gun, knife, &c. to make it powerful in accomplishing its purpose. The "medicines" in (*a*) may be a mixture of all sorts; in (*b*) are pieces of meat,



fish, vegetables, chalk, &c.; and in (c) are pieces of the skins of strong and fierce animals, and powerful vegetable poisons.

When a man or woman desires a child they take either a red bead, or a string of blue pipe beads, and put it round the neck of an image called *madia* (= *maria*), which is in the Roman Catholic Church (called by the natives *nzo a nkisi*=house of fetishes) which is in San Salvador, or else go to one of their medicine-men, or to the lodge of the secret society of the Country-of-the-dead. A charm made of anything, and worn about the body to preserve the wearer from evil spirits, misfortune, or sickness, is named *nkandikilwa*, and the crosses, metal discs, little pictures, &c., given by Roman Catholic priests to be worn by the native adherents of their faith are also called by the same name.

The general term for both male and female images is *teke*. It is thought to have been introduced by the Bateke people, who are clever in wood-carving. It is easy to recognise the district from which an image comes, or the locality in which it has been used as a fetish, because the carver generally imitates in the making of the image the salient characteristics of his clan, as mode of hair, dress, or beard, &c. The native smithy is considered a sacred place, and if anyone steals from it, he will either contract hernia, or become ill and strengthless; and should a person so far forget himself as to sit on the anvil he will get swollen legs for his thoughtlessness. The *nkonzo* charm is taken from the smithy. It consists of two pieces of iron, some shredded grass, a live ember, and some sweet-smelling herbs, and they are supposed to have the power to restore to health a person who is weak from any cause.

If a child is suffering from fever, the mother will make a few small incisions on the left side of the child, and catching a toad (*kiwula*), she slightly cuts it, and rubs the cuts of the toad on the incisions she has made in the child's side so that the blood of child and toad intermingle. The toad is released, and if it dies the child will also die; sometimes a chicken is used instead of a toad. A sick man takes a fowl, cuts its toe, and licks the blood—he takes the life of the fowl into himself.



*By permission of*

*the Baptist Missionary Society*

#### FETISHES AND CHARMS, LOWER CONGO

The images are fetishes of various powers; the dagger has a fetish image as a handle; the horns contain charms for helping hunters; the small bundles are amulets; and the necklace, composed of odds and ends, is powerful to protect the wearer from all harm. One image has "strong medicine" sealed in its stomach; and whoever drinks wine from the hole in the stomach of the big fetish, is protected from its curse.



The fowl is tied up and fed until the man is well, but if the fowl dies the man will die. A person must never spit into the fire, or he will suffer from a sickness in which the blood becomes thin, the hair turns red, and he will suffer from dropsy of the stomach. A leaf from the *ngindu-ngindu* tree is so powerful that it will counteract the evil influences of all charms and fetishes; and should a medicine-man find a leaf of this tree in his house he will have to reinvigorate all his charms, for the presence of this leaf nullifies them and renders them useless.

The charm used by the *moko* medicine-man, by which he ascertains the disease of his patient and the best means of curing it, is a bundle tied up in native cloth, and suspended in a net, and from the middle of the bundle protrudes the long, strong beak of a heron. The stock-in-trade of another medicine-man is a univalve shell (*nkodia*) with some small stones in it, and over the opening of the shell is a plaster of clay with two fowl's feathers sticking in it. The owner shakes the shell so that the rattling of the stones is heard by all present, and then he puts the shell to his ear, and it tells him the disease of his patient and the best means of curing it, or whether or not the accused person has committed the adultery with which he is charged, or the name of the thief who has robbed his client.

The hollow bag of a mushroom (*diya*) is worn round the neck as an amulet to keep the wearer from forgetting, *i.e.* it is a charm against a bad memory; and a shell with charms in it, called *kimbaji-mbaji* (=“to-morrow”), is employed to cause your enemy to put off his evil intentions towards you until to-morrow, and as to-morrow never comes you are thus able to escape his malice. There is a fetish that causes the stoutest person to become a skeleton no matter how much he may eat; another that imparts pneumonia, pleurisy, and other chest complaints; another that causes scrofula; another that is supposed to give deep-seated ulcers. There is also a fetish image by the power of which love-philtres are made; and another that gives asthma, bronchitis, &c. The *mpongo* pot

is a saucepan partly filled with water and placed in the bush near the entrance to a town as a protective fetish. The medicine-man when he prepares this charm puts something into the water to make it fizz, and the folk think it is very powerful because "the water boils without fire." It is employed to make an enemy forget to do evil to those who are protected by it. There are thirty other different fetish images and charms of various powers, and used for a large variety of purposes; but as many of them are incidentally mentioned in other chapters it is not necessary to repeat the information here.

Just as we use scarecrows (*kakungu*) in England, so the people do on the Congo, and these are often mistaken for charms. Four faces are roughly carved on pieces of wood, and put, one at each corner of a peanut field, to frighten away antelopes. To drive away predatory birds, the feathers of birds are scattered about, and bunches of feathers are tied to strings so that they wave to and fro in the breeze. To keep monkeys away from the farms, the owners paint the near trees with various bright colours; and in some farms bunches of grass are tied to resemble a man, and to make the resemblance stronger, an old gun or a piece of wood roughly carved to represent a gun is put over the shoulder of this straw figure, which is called *mama*=fool.

Fetishes can be hired at so much per day. A man is sick and thinks that a certain fetish will do him good, so he sends a fee to its owner, and the fetish is brought and fixed near the patient, who then looks at it, talks to it, and asks it to use its power to cure him. The fetish must be returned next day or another day's hire sent, for the fetish will not benefit the man unless it is his property. If the fee is a fowl then when the fowl is killed its blood is poured over the fetish image or bundle. If the person sent to hire a fetish happens to fall in the road while he is carrying it, then he must lie there until the medicine-man who owned the fetish comes and picks him and the fetish up from the ground. For this mishap he must pay a goat to the medicine-man to restore the fetish to its former



dignity and prestige, and the blood of that goat, when killed, is poured over the degraded fetish.

I want to close this chapter by giving other methods of destroying the spirits of the dead besides burning them. About 1905 a native of a town in the Ngombe Lutete district had an abscess on his cheek, which after a time broke and healed; but some four or five months later another abscess started on his left side. A native doctor was called who gave him many purges, anointed him with "medicines," and let out a quantity of blood by cupping. In 1908 the man became again so ill, that the medicine-man was called, and after he had studied the case, he said the man would die because the spirit (*nkwiya*) of his wife's first husband was in him doing him to death on account of his having married his (spirit's) widow. The woman's family was very angry at this diagnosis, for they said, "No one will marry her for fear of being bewitched by the spirits of her two former husbands."

A week later the man died, and most of the people left the town from fear that deceased's own spirit, and the other spirit that possessed him, would bewitch them. A great witch-doctor was sent for, as it was thought that only one at the head of his profession could deal with such an important case. This man came with all his paraphernalia and cut four short reeds. These he filled with gunpowder, and buried two of them at the foot, and the other two at the head, of the spirit-possessed man's grave. He then solemnly assured the people that these "four guns" would shoot the spirits, so there was no need to fear them. To make the matter doubly sure he put small packets of native red peppers on all the roads leading to the town, as all evilly-disposed spirits have a great horror of red pepper, and will not come near it.

This burying of pretend-guns in the grave of the person whose spirit is to be killed is a very common trick, and is worked for all that it is worth; but it is necessary to ring the changes occasionally by performing a trick that requires a little more elaboration. The witch-doctor has been called to a family suffering from much and frequent illness, and the

sentence of extinction has been passed on the spirit of a deceased member of the family.

On the appointed day the witch-doctor takes his loaded gun, accompanied by many members of the family and several neighbours, to the grave of the man with the evilly-disposed spirit. He lays his gun near the grave, and taking a hoe he begins to dig down to the corpse. When all present have been worked up to the necessary pitch by the patter of the witch-doctor he suddenly throws down his hoe, and screams out that the witch is coming out of the grave. Immediately on hearing such a cry the people run helter-skelter in all directions, not daring to look round; the "doctor" takes out from a fold in his cloth a fowl's bladder filled with blood, which he has prepared for the purpose, and quickly squeezing out the blood into the hole he fires his gun, and then calls on the people to return, assuring them that it is now all right. They flock back that they may see the blood as a proof that he has destroyed the witch (*ndoki*). After this evidence of his prowess has been shown to all, the grave is filled again, and the family is supposed to regain its normal state of health. On one occasion one of our school lads remained behind, unnoticed by the witch-doctor, and saw the whole affair, and denounced the trick to his family and neighbours, and the "doctor" was glad to escape with his life; and this was how we came to know the way they carry out this method of killing a spirit.

## CHAPTER XXII

### TABOOS, FIRST-FRUITS, AND OMENS

THERE is scarcely a food but what is taboo to some one—vegetable, animal, poultry, or insects; and in regard to conduct, taboo is largely responsible for the conservatism of the people; it maintains the *status quo*, and threatens with misfortune anyone who departs from it. Taboos may be divided into two classes—the inherited taboo (*mpangu*), and the personal taboo (*nlongo*): the former is always permanent, while the latter is often temporary. In some districts the word *konko* (=prohibition, command, law) is used more freely than *mpangu*, and one often hears in relation to some taboo that it is the “prohibition of the father” (*konko kia ‘se*).

The inherited taboo passes from father to son—it is about the only thing that the sons inherit from their father; and so long as the daughters form a part of their father’s household, or remain unmarried, they must observe it, but when they marry they generally drop their father’s taboo, and follow that of their husband’s, *i.e.* the one he has inherited from his father.

Sometimes the father will tell his child of this taboo; but in most cases, when the woman is near her confinement, a medicine-man is called, who orders a feast, which is eaten by the same clan only as the woman; and the medicine-man, knowing the taboo (*mpangu*) of the child’s father, says that the child is not to eat certain things, mentioning the taboos that the father inherited, and thus passing them on to his child. Henceforth to the child they become tabooed things (*lekwa ya mpangu*), and to fail in the strict observance of this interdiction means dire consequences to the child—either a bad disease or a great misfortune, or an illness that will be sure to end in death.

In one family, the inherited taboo is not to eat any wild

animal or fish with spots on it, such as the striped antelope, civet cats, leopards, shrimps, &c., and the penalty for breaking this taboo is a very bad skin disease—a form of leprosy. The idea here was to avoid any flesh foods with spots on it, or spots would break out on the eater's body. The inherited taboo of another lad is not to eat hippopotamus flesh, or yams, the penalty being elephantiasis; not to eat crayfish, the penalty being a skin disease on the hand; not to eat *raw* palm-nuts, the penalty being an outbreak of scald head; not to eat a fish with opal eyes (the *nlumbu*), the penalty for so doing being ophthalmia and loss of eyelashes; not to eat the great bull frog (*ezunda*), or the eyes would bulge out like the frog's. Here the penalties are in accord with the broken prohibitions;—eating hippopotamus causes elephantiasis, or legs like the legs of a hippopotamus; eating a fish with opal eyes—very uncommon on the Lower Congo—causes bad eyes; and eating the frog causes bulging eyes. These animals which are their inherited taboos do not act as omens to them, neither do they regard them with respect; for they will help to kill them—they only have “not to eat them” for fear of the penalties. I have spoken to some who have told me that “there are no such prohibitions” in their families; and another well-informed man told me that anyone could eat things prohibited by his inherited taboo without evil consequences, if he ate them fearlessly, and did not boast about what he had done, *i.e.* if he thought they would not hurt him, had no conscience in the matter, and did not let the ever-listening spirits hear that he had broken his taboo.

The individual, or personal taboo (*nlongo*) is not inherited, but is sometimes lifelong, and at other times it is to be observed for a short period only. It means, “medicine, poison, fetish,” and hence taboo. Its restrictions are quite empirical, and are made according to the whimsical fancies of whatever “doctor” may be called in to treat the patient.

When a person is ill, the medicine-man says that the patient is not to eat a certain kind of food, and for ever after that the prohibited thing is taboo (*nlongo*) to him. To eat it is to

break the protective spell and incur a return of the complaint. The article prohibited is quite arbitrary, there being no relation whatever between the forbidden thing and the disease; *e.g.* I knew a native woman who was troubled with fits, and the "doctor" told her she was never to look in a looking-glass or gaze at her reflection in a stream. In one or two cases I know, the men are not to eat any form of cassava throughout the whole of their lives, which is like prohibiting an Englishman from eating flour in any form, whether as bread, pastry, pudding, &c. A looking-glass is taboo to a child, for if it looks into one, it will start in its sleep and have bad dreams.

Sometimes the taboo (*nlongo*) is only for, say, six months, and then the "doctor" removes it and receives his fee. At times it is put on an unborn babe, and is to remain on it until its hair is cut and its nails trimmed, and when the time comes the "doctor" is sent for to cut the hair and nails, and take away the taboo. In some cases the taboo is placed on a child until it marries, or until it has a child, or until it gives birth to both a *boy* and a *girl*. The taboo may be the snout of a pig, or the whole of pig meat; the head of a goat, or every part of a goat; certain kinds of fish, or one or two kinds of vegetables.

In some parts the fetish taboo (*nlongo*) and the interdiction (*konko*) are equivalent, while in other districts the *konko* carries with it the idea of prohibition, command, or regulation made by a chief, or a medicine-man, and can thus be, on the one hand, a taboo for the benefit of the whole town over which the chief rules, when it is equal to a command or law, and on the other hand a taboo put by a "doctor" on a person for his benefit. Sometimes, through much sickness in a town, or on account of bad luck experienced by the inhabitants of the town, or on account of drought, or because many pigs or goats have died, or the animals and fowls will not breed properly, the whole town is placed under certain restrictions, such as "that nothing tied up is to be carried into or through the town," and consequently all bundles and parcels must be undone outside the town and carried loosely into it; or the restriction may be that no water is to be carried into the town on the head of any



person, and thus every woman as she draws near to the town takes her water-bottle from its well-poised position on her head, and carries it in her arms. Such restrictions are removed when they are supposed to have served their purpose. In the case of the temporary taboos the "doctor" does not receive his fee until he goes and removes them from his patients.

In the district of Ngombe Lutete the women will not eat the cat-fish or baghre (*ngola*) for fear of barrenness, and for the same reason the women around San Salvador will eat no birds except the African partridge (*ngumbe*) and the guinea-fowl (*nkelele*) until they have given birth to a boy and a girl. Another taboo (called *nkamba*), usually forbidding the eating of one of the siluroids or, occasionally, goat's flesh, may be laid on a woman for a time only, *e.g.* until a child is born or weaned, or until both a boy and a girl have been born. When children of a married couple have died in succession, a medicine-man will recommend that the influence of the fetish power of *wumba* should be invoked, and a ceremony (described on page 228) is performed. This is followed by a feast, in which the couple eat some goat, pork, fish, and eels, and afterwards certain foods are tabooed to both the man and woman. The first child born to them after the invocation of this particular fetish power is always named *Wumba*. For a month after confinement it is taboo (*nlongo*) for the woman to cook for a man, or to touch a man, or anything belonging to him; even her husband's food must not be cooked in her house.

During the "honeymoon" the new bride must not mention her husband's name, but after that period is over she may use his Portuguese name (*santu*). As a rule, however, in addressing their husbands, the women do not use either the native name or the *santu*, but just say "E ngeye" (=O you). There is no punishment if they do mention his native name during the "honeymoon," beyond the fact that other women regard them with surprise, talk about them, and consider them lacking in proper modesty. The name of the dead is tabooed, and is therefore never mentioned, but if it is necessary to refer to the deceased one, they call him "old what's his name" (*nkulu*

*nengandi*) or "old Peter" (*nkulu Mpetelo*), or "of the name of Peter" (*ejina dia Mpetelo*). Any photographs of the deceased are torn up, all signs of him removed from the house, and every effort is made to forget him. In the native week there are four days, each day having a name denoting the markets held on that day, and on two of these days (*Nkenge* and *Konzo*) it is taboo for them to bury the dead. Whether these days are bad for the deceased, because of being unfavourable to a good reception in the spirit town, or unlucky for the mourners, we do not know, as the reason for the prohibition is entirely forgotten.

It is taboo for a man to speak to his mother-in-law, but if it is necessary for them to hold communication, a messenger must be employed. Should a man meet his mother-in-law in the road by accident no fine is inflicted, but if he sees her coming and does not attempt to evade her by going into the bush, or round the houses, then public opinion will so strongly condemn him that he will be compelled to send her a goat and an apology. A man must respect his mother-in-law, and the natives say that the only way he can do that is never to speak to her, look at her, or be in her company. I have asked several old and intelligent men the reason for this prohibition, and the invariable answer has been, "My wife came from her womb"; but my own opinion is that the restriction put on all communications between them, and so stringently enforced, is in order to avoid all possibility of incest.

The forge of a native blacksmith is considered sacred by the people, and they never steal from it. If any one did so he would be punished by contracting a severe form of hernia (*mpiki*); and if any one so far forgot himself as to sit on the anvil, his legs would become swollen. On the other hand, a blacksmith must not charge for mending a hoe, or for putting a new handle to a hoe; but he may receive an offering of not more than one string of common blue pipe beads.

These examples only illustrate a tithe of the taboos to be found among the people: for the lives of the natives are affected and largely regulated by taboos, which must not be lightly

pooh-poohed, as their health, good luck, and happiness are assured by their observance, or imperilled by their disregard of them. The taboos are the "Thou shalt nots" of the native religion. Is a man suffering from a disease or a series of misfortunes? then consciously or unconsciously he has broken one of the "Thou shalt nots," and uncleanness, moral impurity, sin if you like, has followed on the breaking of the taboo, and as a result punishment has ensued. "Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him," is recognised by these primitive people as being as true to-day as it was when uttered in ancient times.

How can the man free himself from the trouble that he regards as a punishment, because either he himself, or one of his family, has broken a taboo, or otherwise offended the spirits? He selects and fees the medicine-man whom he thinks has the ability to put him right with the powers that be, by performing certain rites and ceremonies; and if he recovers his normal condition, then he is fortunate in his first selection of the medium for the readjustment; but if the trouble is not removed, he then goes to other medicine-men in search of relief, *i.e.* in the hope of finding the one who will be able to appease the particular power that has been offended by the breaking of the taboo, or some other overt act of his.

A parent can bless his children by strictly observing the taboo (*mpangu*), or he can curse them by breaking it; *e.g.* if the taboo is not to eat hippopotamus flesh, or yams, the father who observes it is supposed to pass on to his children an immunity from elephantiasis; but if he break that taboo then he curses his children by rendering them liable to that particular disease, which is the penalty for breaking that taboo. So careful are they to keep this taboo that they will not risk breaking it by eating yams, solely because, I think, the name for yams (*kwa nguvu*) is similar to the name for hippopotamus (*nguvu*).

A clear distinction must be kept in mind between the troubles that come on a person from breaking a taboo, and those that arise from witchcraft; and the difference is often



*By permission of the*

# NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL RATTLES

*Baptist Missionary Society*

1 and 2 are made of cane, and have bits of loosely-folded tin in them to make a sound as they are shaken; 3 is a section of the seed-pod of an Albizzia tree, and the dried seeds rattle inside. Rattles are largely used by witch-doctors and others in their dances.





difficult to trace, because the native is ever reluctant to admit of his own guilt, and that he is suffering the penal consequences of "breaking through the hedge," but is always ready to place his sufferings to the credit of witchcraft—*i.e.* that someone else is wicked, not he; but that point, whether witchcraft or a broken taboo is the cause of the complaint, is usually decided by the medicine-man himself.

How did the taboo originate? Well, so far as Congo is concerned, I think the various medicine-men are responsible for the taboos, because by them they leave a loophole of reasonable excuse for their failures to effect a cure—so and so has not happened as it should because a taboo has been disregarded, or something has been done that should not have been done, or left undone that should have been done; and the native is satisfied with the reason, and is willing to pay the fee to have the matter set right.

The following is an example of how the *status quo* is maintained. In 1909 a man named Kiala of Wombe was ill with a severe cough and bad chest, and on the complaint growing worse, a medicine-man of the *bitodi* cult was called in to discover what retarded the patient's recovery. On arrival the "doctor" took his fetish and locked himself in a house. He told the people they would see the house shake as they heard the voices of the spirits (*nkwiya*) talking to him. The *bitodi* fetish spoke and the spirits answered, and the voices of young and old men, of young and old women, were heard in conversation. After a long consultation between the fetish and the spirits, the medicine-man came out and said, "When the brother of the sick man married, he did not give any palm wine to his wife's family, and consequently this sickness has come as a punishment for breaking a country custom." The spirit (*nkwiya*) also stated through the "doctor," "One or two of the three sisters of the sick man was a witch (*ndoki*), and they all three must bless the patient, so as to remove the evil influence." The breaking of the country custom by a brother caused the sickness, and the witchcraft of a sister kept Kiala from getting well. The sisters one by one took their sick

brother's right hand, and, having pretended to spit on it, said, "May you have blessings and good fortune" (*Ovw' ensambu yo malawu*). The medicine-man in this case, to prove his power, heated a matchet red-hot three times, and licked it each time. He received as a fee for his services an amount equal to twenty-four shillings.

*First-fruits and Planting.*—Of the first farm produce of the season of maize, peanuts, and beans, one of each is thrown towards the rising sun. The practice is to eat one and throw one, saying, "We are eating them for ever, or from year to year" (*Tudianga zo (or mo) yamu mvu ya mvu*). There is a somewhat similar custom respecting the first tooth that comes out of a child. It is thrown towards the rising sun, with the words, "Bring me a new tooth when you come again," and at the same time a piece of charcoal is thrown towards the west, with the formula, "Take away my old tooth, I do not want it again." At San Salvador a lad gives his first rat, or his first bird, to his father, his mother, or his uncle. And the first of almost everything is given by the recipient to a member of his family, as first payment received for work, &c.

Women must remain chaste while planting pumpkin and calabash seeds, and they must wash their hands before touching the seeds. Neither may they eat pig-meat during the planting of these particular seeds. If a woman does not observe these taboos, she must not plant the seeds, or the crop will be a failure; she may make the holes, and her baby girl, or another who has obeyed the restrictions, can drop in the seed and cover them over. They never cook pumpkin leaves with palm oil, as they believe that their mouths and noses would rot away (from *lupus*) after eating the mixture. The leaves are cooked and eaten by themselves without any ill effect.

Omens are, in some instances, another form of taboo, *i.e.* a taboo on certain actions which, if done, will bring trouble on the doer of them, or upon the person to whom they are done. To strike the foot (*ta esakuba*) against anything is regarded as very unfortunate. If it is done on the road it is thought to be a very bad omen, and when it happens, men on a journey will return

to the nearest town and start again a few hours later, or the next day. Some turn round and strike the object again with the foot to remove or undo the evil effects of the first striking. A man knocking his foot on the way to a hunt will turn back, for he knows he will have no success. Men going to fight another town have to jump over the saucepan of the medicine-man, and if one of them strikes his foot against it he is forcibly restrained from going to the fight, for he will be killed. To step over a person's body or legs will cause ill-luck to that person, and is most carefully avoided, for the man passing out of a crowd of sitting men will shuffle his feet along the ground, and thus avoid lifting them, so as not be charged with bringing bad luck on anyone. Should he inadvertently step over anyone, he stands still with his legs astride, and the other man crawls between them, and undoes the evil effect. A cock crowing at the wrong hour is killed because it is an omen of some ill-fortune. From 8 P.M. to 1 A.M. is regarded as an ill-omened time for crowing. If the blue plantain-eater (*ntoyo*) chirps near a man's house early in the morning, it is a sign of death.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### DIAGNOSIS AND DIVINATION

THE greatest difficulty experienced by medical men practising their healing art among such primitive peoples as are found on the Congo, and in other parts of Africa, is to extract from their patients a clear description of the symptoms of the complaint from which they are suffering. For untold generations the people have expected their medicine-men, unaided by any examination or close questioning of the patients, to discover their diseases and prescribe for them. It is their business to do so, and their success or failure in this particular is a test of the genuineness of their claim to pose as medicine-men. The natives, therefore could not understand the white doctor looking at the tongue, feeling the pulse, sounding the chest, listening for the heart murmurs, &c. Their first attitude was that of suspicion of his ability to heal, and utter contempt for his methods; but these gave way to a tacit acknowledgment of benefits received, and later to a keen appreciation of his abilities, and such admiration for his marvellous powers, that some of them wonder why white folk are silly enough to die when they have such wonderful medicine-men at their command.

There was not only this suspicion about the white doctor and his medicine, and extreme shyness in describing their symptoms; but there was also a great paucity of symptom-words. To "have a head," or "have a stomach," or "have an arm," were about the only native phrases for all kinds of pains in the part mentioned, arising from any and every cause. When they were without pain they scarcely recognised the existence of their bodies, and it was the medicine-man's duty to find out why any particular member of their body, where

the pain was located, should obtrude itself on their notice. All that the patient had to do was to send for the medicine-man and he did the rest—even to guessing the position of the complaint and its nature.

The aversion of the natives to an examination of any kind, their ignorance of physiology, their inability to note their symptoms, and the lack of useful words descriptive of their pains, &c., were great hindrances to a proper diagnosis of their maladies, and also frequently an obstacle to a successful treatment of them; but in spite of these disabilities European doctors have made great strides in relieving native suffering, disarming their suspicions, destroying their superstitions, and winning the confidence and entire faith of the people. No body of men has done more to raise the status of the white man in the opinion of the natives than the doctors, of whatever nationality, who have so ungrudgingly devoted their time, their skill, their health, and, in some cases, their lives for the alleviation of pain, the saving of life, and the hygienic betterment of the natives of the Congo.

The writer has had no medical training, but in the early eighties he found at San Salvador a good stock of simple medicines, and a supply of medical works, the former belonging to the mission—which has always recognised that the souls of the people are in bodies that need, at times, medical treatment<sup>1</sup>—and the latter to a colleague who had gone to another station. Although he had no special training, he thought that whatever he did in the way of doctoring would be better than what the natives could do for themselves, and with that idea he treated all who came to him, and had special hours for dispensary work.

One afternoon a chief entered the house, and requested medicine for his stomach.

“What is the matter with your stomach?” I asked.

“Oh, I ‘have a stomach,’ and it wants medicine,” was the reply; and in spite of many questions, put in various ways, nothing more could be elicited from our supposed patient, and

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, Note VI, p. 311, for list of native diseases.



we felt in a quandary. At last in desperation we threw open the doors of the medicine cabinet, containing some fifty bottles of different kinds of drugs, and told him to help himself to whichever he liked.

The array of bottles surprised him, and it dawned upon him that he might possibly take the wrong one and poison himself, and he stated his difficulty.

"If you won't tell me," I said, "what is the matter with your stomach, how can I give you the right remedy?"

He then confessed that he did not exactly want the medicine just then. "But the fact is," he said, "I am on the way to a big feast, and I thought if I had some of your medicine to drink when I got there it would help me to eat plenty, plenty without any pain coming in my stomach, for I have heard that your medicine is very wonderful."

I expressed my sympathy with the object he had in view, and advised him to come after the feast, which he did, and swallowed the nauseous draught of Epsom salts with a very wry face. We never had any more requests of that kind.

One evening a man came to me with the statement, "I have a chest." We listened to his breathing, &c., and came to the conclusion, rightly or wrongly, that he had a touch of pleurisy. I administered a fly blister, and told the man to go to bed. Early next morning he came running into my house, and said, "White man, look where the evil spirit has come out." As the pain was gone and there was a blister on his chest, he thought that the evil spirit had been pulled out by the white man's strong medicine. These are illustrations of the way in which our medicines were regarded—as a kind of magic; and although the European doctors and their drugs have ousted the native witch-doctors with their incantations and ceremonies from many districts, they are still supreme in many parts where white men and their medicines have not yet penetrated—places where the following methods are still as much in vogue as they were all over the Congo twenty years ago.

The general practitioner (*ngang' a wuka*) among the native

"doctors" deals in simples,<sup>1</sup> decoctions, and charms for curing their patients. His name, *wuka*, means to cure or heal; and he undoubtedly knows something about medicinal herbs that is really helpful, and in so far as he administers these there is no quackery about his practice. This "doctor" (*ngang' a moko*) decides whether his patient is troubled by an ordinary sickness, or by an evil spirit, or by witchcraft. Whatever his distinctive name (*moko*=arms) may have meant, it has now lost its significance. This "doctor" is more frequently a woman than a man; and her bag of tricks is either a bundle or a box of charms. The witch-finder's (*ngang' a ngombo*=guesser) special function is to point out the witch (*ndoki*) who has caused the death of the deceased on whose behalf he is engaged. This "doctor" is sometimes, but rarely, engaged to discover the witch who is troubling a sick man, especially if the said patient is influential and wealthy—a chief of importance. Usually, however, he is not sent for until the person is dead; and he must not belong to the same family or clan as the deceased. These three "doctors" must always find their way to the village and to the house of a patient without guidance or instruction, and they must also discover the sickness from which their patients are suffering, or the cause of death, without asking a single direct question.

When a person arrives at the village of the *wuka* doctor, and asks him to go and see a woman who, for example, has a very bad abscess in her right leg, the "doctor" sends his assistant on ahead to find out where the sick woman is living. Having ascertained the house, the assistant puts a certain leaf on the roads leading from outside the town, where the "doctor" will enter, up towards the house. Near the house he places twigs, and although the people see the assistant putting these marks on the paths, they pretend to express great surprise when the "doctor" walks right up to his patient's house without any apparent guidance.

The "doctor" in diagnosing a case must not ask any direct questions, but he meets that difficulty as follows: he asks a

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, Note VII, p. 312, for catalogue of native remedies.

series of very indirect questions, and if those present say *Ndungu* he knows he is on the wrong tack ; but if they answer *Otuama*, he knows he is on the right one, and the more excitedly they say the word the nearer he knows he is to the truth. Hence he starts somewhat in this way :

“There are such things as pains in the stomach.”

“*Ndungu*,” quietly say the people sitting a circle or semi-circle about the “doctor.”

“Sometimes there are backaches, headaches, and pains in the chest.”

“*Ndungu*,” is said very coldly by the crowd.

The “doctor” knows he is on the wrong tack, but still he has managed to narrow the circle of affected parts, so he begins again.

“There are such things as severe pains and aches in the arms and legs.”

“*Otuama*,” respond the deluded folk.

He now knows that the affected part is either an arm or a leg, and he continues to narrow it down thus until at last he says, “Ah, the right leg is bad.” The people excitedly shout “*Otuama*,” snap their fingers, and look at the “doctor” with awe-filled eyes.

The “doctor” now knows that it is the right leg that has to be treated. What are the most common complaints of the leg? Rheumatism, boils, cuts, sprains, and abscesses. So he starts off to discover the malady and its location on the leg, and the people respond “*Ndungu*” coldly when he misses his guess, or excitedly shout “*Otuama*” as by this cunning process he narrows the circle smaller and smaller, until at last, to their astonishment, he says, “The woman is suffering from a bad abscess on the inside part of her right leg.”

The people think that such a clever man, who has found out all about the disease without being told, is just the man to cure the complaint. He is consequently engaged at once and well paid. The “doctor” then for the first time sees his patient, and without any examination of the abscess he applies

a poultice, gives some simple medicine to drink, and receiving his fee departs for his town.

Supposing that after due time the woman becomes worse rather than better, her family decides that the charms of the first "doctor" were not powerful enough to effect a cure, or there may be a difference of opinion, some arguing that it is a case of witchcraft. To decide that point a red bead that has been worn by the sick woman is carried to the village of the *moko* doctor, who puts it under her pillow at night and dreams about the complaint of the patient who sent it—she may have three or four beads from as many sick people. In the morning she tells the messenger the cause of the illness, and the treatment to be followed. She is very wary in her diagnosis, so as to leave an opening for the introduction of witchcraft should it be necessary to do so.

Should the patient not recover after calling in another *wuka* "doctor," but a series of abscesses break out, then the family send for the *moko* "doctor" to come. The messenger pays her one fowl and 500 strings of beads—as the case is serious the fee is high—and she receives another fowl on her arrival in the patient's town. This "doctor" conducts an inquiry similar to the one sketched above, and, after due consideration, states if the woman is suffering from natural causes, or from witchcraft. Should she say there is no special witchcraft in the case, another *wuka* "doctor" is engaged; but should she declare that witchcraft is at work, the family will fee another doctor (see *ngang' a nkwiya*, page 223) who will go through the town night after night calling on the witch to desist from its evil practices or it will certainly be punished; and he will also threaten the said witch with all kinds of curses and imprecations. As this sort of witch (*nzingi*) is supposed to be working through a human medium, the curses, &c., are to frighten the person who is allowing herself (or himself) to be used as the medium.

If the *moko* "doctor" says that it is an evil spirit that is troubling the woman and retarding her recovery, her relatives resort to a witch-doctor whose special business it is to appease

## 260 DRIVING AWAY EVIL SPIRITS

spirits by sacrifices, or frighten them away by threats, by firing guns at them, and making hideous noises. Many a time in the years gone by have I heard these witch-doctors, or some relatives of the sick person, go through the town in the dead of the night, beating an iron bell and calling on the witch to leave the sick woman alone, or means would be taken to discover and punish it if the woman died. I have also seen them rushing about, shouting, howling, screeching, and firing guns in the air to drive away the evil spirit that was distressing the sick one. If, in spite of all these efforts, the woman continues ill, or becomes worse, her relatives will take her secretly, as a last chance, out of the house in the dead of the night, and quietly carry her to another town. By this means they hope to cheat the witch or evil spirit by taking the victim secretly beyond its ken, and consequently beyond its malign influence. They think that the knowledge of the witch, and also of the evil spirit, is very limited, and the area of its power very circumscribed. Whenever I missed a sick person from the town I never inquired too closely about their whereabouts, for if the person interrogated knew, he would not dare to reveal where the sick one had gone, lest the witch should hear and follow.

Should the woman die notwithstanding all these efforts then the family meets and discusses the whole affair. If the *moko* "doctor" said that the abscesses were due to natural causes, or that the woman was troubled by an evil spirit, nothing more can be done save to bury the body and have the usual wailing over it, with the ordinary funeral festivities. But, if the *moko* "doctor" declared that the woman was under the spell of witchcraft, the witch-finder is called to investigate the matter, and search for the witch.

The witch-finder has an assistant who spends a day or two in the deceased woman's town, ferreting out her past life, mode of living, habits, and temper—quarrelsome or otherwise. All the information thus gathered he passes on to his master, who, primed with the facts, and with the road marked out with leaves and twigs, walks right straight through the town to his



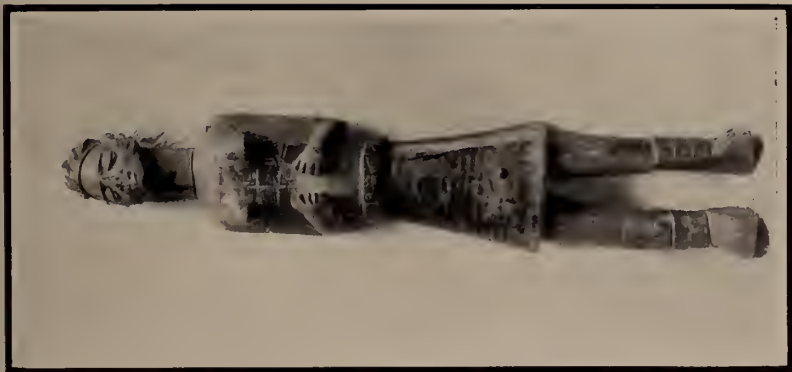


*Photo by*

*the Author*

#### EUROPEAN IMAGE

This wooden image, still in my possession, was given me thirty years ago by a lad in whose family it had been for several generations, and by them it had been regarded as a fetish. It most probably belongs to the sixteenth century, when the R.C. priests were dominant in the country.



*Lent by*

*Rev. J. L. Forfeitt*

#### NATIVE FETISH

This is a female fetich; and it is most probable that the Lower Congo fetishes are an imitation of the images of saints, etc., introduced by the Portuguese priests during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.



client's house. A ring is formed, and the witch-finder, who may be a man or a woman, dances and chants to the beat of drums, puts question after question, and is answered by the people with *Ndungu* or *Otuama* as he guesses rightly or wrongly about the woman's ways. Presently he elicits that she recently had a very bad quarrel with someone, then he discovers it was with a man—perhaps her brother, or son, or husband, or a distant relative. By crafty questions he narrows the circle, the people, all excitement, really helping him, and at last he declares it is such and such a person; and the whole crowd is astonished that they had never thought of him before as a monster who had used witchcraft to do the person to death. If they had only thought for a moment, it could assuredly have been no one else but he who is denounced by the witch-finder. This man has now finished his part, so he takes his liberal fee and departs. As a rule he receives his fee and sends it away before he begins, for the accused does not always take the charge of witchcraft quietly, but will sometimes go for his gun to shoot the witch-finder, who therefore hurries quickly from the town.

Sometimes two, and even three, persons are implicated in the charge of witchcraft, and then it is necessary to ascertain which of them is the real witch that should take the ordeal. To determine that, the witch-finder takes two or three small boys, one to represent each suspected adult, and gives a small quantity of the ordeal to each of them and watches the result. If the symptoms shown by one or two of the boys are such as to warrant him, he will then accuse the person or persons they represent of witchcraft, and they will have to take the ordeal in the proper way. And if neither of the boys exhibits any signs of witchcraft, then some others will be suspected, and their representatives will be appointed to take the ordeal. Only members of the same family can bewitch one another, and only lads of the same family as the deceased are used as tests, and they are well paid for their trouble. After making his declaration of the witch, or discovering the witch by the aid of the lads, the witch-finder goes away. It is not his business to administer the ordeal.

The witch-finder does not always declare that it is a person who is guilty of the witchcraft, or of "having eaten the deceased"; but sometimes he accuses a fetish (*nkisi*), or a spirit, of having eaten the person, and if the latter he overrides the assertion of the *moko* "doctor," who may have stated that an evil spirit was not the cause of the death. I found the different orders of "doctors" often contradicted each other, whether from rivalry, jealousy, or self-conceit it was at times difficult to say. Sometimes those in a locality would work well together and corroborate each other's diagnosis, and in other parts they would not, or all would make a set against one of their number and belittle him. As the ordeal cannot be given to a fetish, or to a spirit, a "doctor" whose speciality it is to deal with these super-human powers is sent for that he may appease the spirit, or remove the evil influence of the fetish from the family.

On the accusation of a person of witchcraft the *nkasa* "doctor" is called to administer the ordeal. The ordeal (*nkasa*) is the poisonous bark of a tree pounded fine and sometimes mixed with water, and at other times placed in the mouth of the accused and washed down with palm wine. The *nkasa* tree is never cut for any other purpose except the procuring of a portion of its bark for the ordeal ceremony. The ordeal-giver (called *ngang' a ngol' a nkasa*) is the only person who is supposed to cut this tree, and when he does so he must use a certain formula, for the natives believe that this tree has a spirit, hence its use as an ordeal for the discovery of witchcraft. It is not the medicinal properties of the bark that affect the stomach of him who takes it, but the spirit in the tree that reveals, or otherwise, the witchcraft in the person receiving it. The ordeal "doctor" on going to the tree says, "I wish to procure a portion of your bark, and if the person for whom I am cutting it is really a witch, let my matchet bend when I strike you; but if he is not let my matchet enter you, and the wind stop blowing." It often happens that the air is very still, not a leaf stirring, for two or three hours before a storm, and this stillness of the air is credited to the above cause—that someone, somewhere, is cutting the ordeal tree. Although the omens

may be in favour of the person accused of witchcraft, the ordeal-giver proceeds with the administration of the ordeal; and the results are not infrequently quite contrary to the omens, but their belief is unaffected by such a contretemps.

Having procured the ordeal, the "doctor," accompanied by many people, takes the accused to the bare top of a hill, where they build a hut of palm fronds, and hanging fronds in the doorway, they tie a lath across the middle of the hut. The ordeal-giver pushes a stone towards the accused, on which twenty-seven small heaps of ordeal have been put: he grinds each heap to powder, and takes one lot after the other and feeds the accused person with them. During this process the accused must spread out his hands, and he is not allowed to touch anything. After swallowing the ordeal the "doctor" puts a curse on him, the curse that if he is a witch he will die by the ordeal.

Should the accused vomit three times he is given a fourth dose, and if he vomits that he proves beyond all doubt that he is not a witch. The people lead him back to the town singing songs in his praise, and, dressing him in fine clothes, they thus show their gladness that he has so successfully stood the test and proved himself innocent of the charge of witchcraft. He can then mulct his accuser in a very heavy fine. But if the accused does not vomit, or if he vomits and there are signs of blood or green matter in it, or if he has bad diarrhœa, they know that he is a witch. He is brought out of the hut and killed, and his body is left on the hill-top, to be devoured by wild beasts, eagles, and crows.

Should the accused person be very obnoxious to the people generally, and they are set on killing him, they will put him to several severe tests, although he may have vomited properly according to their custom. The effect of the ordeal is to daze the person who has taken it, and to deaden his wits. They will test him thus: procuring twigs of six different trees, they will throw one after the other at him in quick succession, requiring him to mention at once the name of each tree from which the twig was taken. Should he be successful, they will



point to various ants running about the ground in front of him, and ask him to give their names; and after passing this test, he is called upon to name the butterflies and birds as they sail by, and should he fail in any single trial, he is pronounced a witch, and pays the penalty with his life, for a witch is the most hated thing in all Congoland.

The administering of the ordeal bark (called *bau kia nkasa* = divination by the *nkasa* tree) is not only used for discovering a witch or proving an accused person innocent of the charge of witchcraft; but it is also employed in serious accusations of theft, and for bad cases of adultery when guilt is denied. It is then given by a divination "doctor" (*ngang' a bau*) in small doses in the town, or the outskirts, and if the accused retains the ordeal he is guiltless of the charge, and can demand compensation from his accusers, but if he vomits he pays the imposed fines for his crime, and the matter ends. For lying, petty thefts, and ordinary cases of adultery there are other tests—seven in number, applied by the divination "doctor." There is the trial by *hot knife* (*bau kia mbele*). The knife is made hot, and is passed three times over the skin of the leg, or once down the side of the leg by the calf, once over the arm, and once down the cheek. If the person is not burnt, he is innocent.

Then there is the *boiling oil test* (*bau kia maji*). The accused must put his hand and arm in a vessel of boiling palm oil three times, and bring out each time a piece of native bread (*kwanga*). If he is not scalded, he is guiltless of the charge brought against him. The "doctor" procures some bark of the baobab-tree, and pressing the juice out of it, he rubs it on the hand and arm of any accused person who will pay him for it, and he can then dip his arm in with impunity. If the accused will not pay the "doctor" his price, he rubs on some other decoction which is not protective. The *bracelet test* (*bau kia nkangu*) is the same as the previous one, except that a bracelet is put into the oil instead of the bread. The bracelet is used when a woman or girl is being tried, the bread when a man or boy. The accused woman must not only bring out the

bracelet but also put it on her arm. If uninjured she is innocent of the charge.

In divination by *knotted grass* (*bau kia nienje*), several pieces of grass are cut, and one piece is knotted at one end. The knotted piece is put with the others, and all the ends are held loosely in the closed fist. The accused has to pull out all the pieces, and leave the knotted one in the fist, or he is guilty. A *large bean* (*nkandi*) is used by the witch-finder in his search for the witch. He twists two pieces of string together, and, having bored a hole through the bean, he passes the twisted string through it. He then holds the string in a perpendicular position, and says to the bean, "If it is a woman who is the witch in this affair, then drop down the string; but if it is a man then go up the string." This divination he uses for his own benefit as a guide as to whom he should accuse, when he is uncertain.

There is also a *bead test* (*bau kia mbiya*). A blue pipe glass bead about  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch long and  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick, with broken, jagged ends, is put between the upper eyelid and the eyeball. It is left in that position a few minutes, and if the accused can bear the pain until the "doctor" takes the bead out, he is innocent of the charge. If the pain is unbearable and the bead is removed before the "doctor" gives the word it is a sign of guilt. The *hot water test* (*bau kia maza ma tiya*) is much the same as the boiling oil test.

The "doctor" is expected to stand all these tests himself without suffering any inconvenience. Unless he is prepared to undergo each ordeal (except taking the *nkasa*) before the accused, he is regarded with very little respect, and would soon lose his practice. Undoubtedly they know of juices, &c. that help them to bear these tests successfully, and they are willing to sell their knowledge to any accused person who cares to pay the price.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### DEATH AND BURIAL

THE natives have very little fear of death. By that statement it is not meant that they are courageous in war, and court death by their reckless bravery; but believing that they are immortal until bewitched, they give little or no thought to death, and rarely talk about the possibility of their own or anyone's death. Among them, all other folk are liable to the evil machinations of witchcraft but themselves. No shot will touch them, no crocodile will hurt them, and no disease will kill them, unless the bullet, the crocodile, or the complaint has some witchcraft about it. Hence a man is restrained by force from going to a fight if the omen is against him; or he will swim a river infested with crocodiles, believing that they will not touch him; or he will crowd unnecessarily into the house of a small-pox patient, feeling secure in the power of his fetish to counteract all witchcraft and protect him from all diseases. What the natives fear above all things is witchcraft, and in that fear they live and move and pass their existence.

On the other hand, contradictory as it may seem, the strong incentive among the people to industry, to travel, and to trade, is not so much to procure the money with which to buy food (their wives supply them with that), but to hoard enough cloth, &c. for a grand funeral that will be the talk of the district; for they believe that the grander their funeral the better will be their reception in the spirit land. The strong desire they have for children springs from the same motive—sons to bury them properly and daughters to cry for them. They prefer daughters to sons, for there is not only the portion of their marriage money, but they cry longer and better

than boys and men. They cannot but know that all who have preceded them have died, and although they place those deaths at the door of witchcraft, they must feel that their own turn to be bewitched will eventually come, hence their preparations for a great funeral.

When a person dies, it is the custom for the women belonging to the deceased's family to gather from the surrounding towns and villages to assist at the mourning. For this purpose they will neglect their farms, children, and husbands, and will crowd into the house where the corpse is lying, and there sit day after day giving unasked advice to the chief mourner and praising the dead in songs and chants. So fond are they of the excitement of attending a funeral, that they will rake up a relationship to the dead, and failing in that, they will say, "Well, he (or she) is a relative of my particular friend." Men, to show sorrow, will give cloth to wind round the body for the burial; but the women to express their sympathy wail and rub mud on their bodies, and both male and female mourners go unkempt for many days, and even months.

If it is a man who is dead, one of his wives sleeps on a mat close by the corpse, which is so arranged on a mat that the fluids of the body drain into a basin. The woman runs her finger frequently over the corpse to press out the moisture; she must empty the basin when full, and when she goes to eat she is not allowed to wash her hands. This process she repeats until the body is perfectly shrivelled up. Should she exhibit any natural reluctance to performing these offices for the dead, she is urged on by the other women present, and reminded by them that he was a good husband who treated her well, and supplied her with good cloth, &c. The man must operate in the same way on the body of his deceased wife, if she is a woman of any importance; and to fail in rendering these last rites to the dead is to cover oneself with shame, and be accused of heartlessness.

After the fluids have drained from the body, the corpse is placed on a shelf, a fire is lit beneath it, and it is thoroughly

smoke-dried. The corpse is sometimes kept for two, three, or more years before it is buried. When for some reason it is not advisable to keep the body in the house, a hole is dug, the corpse is tied up in a mat, and the bundle is suspended from a pole laid across the hole. Sticks and palm fronds are laid over the hole, and earth is thrown over all to keep the smell down. There the body remains until the family is able to bury it properly.

The burial of an important man is very costly. For many months the family sends to all the markets, far and near, to buy all the fowls, goats, and pigs that can be obtained at a reasonable price. Having purchased sufficient, the invitations are sent out, and every invitation must be accompanied by a present of varying value, from one fowl to two goats, according to the position of the person invited. Each person thus invited takes with him as many wives, slaves, and followers as he can, for the greater his retinue the more important he is in the estimation of others. Only forty or fifty persons may really be invited, but those who will attend, as their followers, may number several hundreds, and they are all fed for three or four days at the expense of the deceased's family. Every person *invited* to the funeral gives a present of trade goods, cloths, &c. "to wind round the body," according to his rank and standing in the district; and although the articles thus presented to the sorrowing family may be twice the value of the goats sent with the invitation, yet they will not pay for the pigs, &c., eaten and the palm wine drunk during the funeral festivities. I remember the case of a headman at San Salvador whose sister was married to the King; when she died, Dom Miguel had to bury her as a queen should be buried; and the expenses were so great, and the goods given "to wind round the body" were so small in comparison, that he was financially ruined for life; although he worked hard as a blacksmith, and was a keen trader, he never really disentangled himself from the debts thus incurred.

On the afternoon of January 12, 1883, I went to Mputu (between seventy and eighty minutes' walk south-east of San





*Photo by*

# GRAVES, LOWER CONGO

*Rev. F. Oldrieve*

1. The grave of a wealthy man. The jugs, mugs, basins, etc., were bought of traders. 2. Hut built over the grave of an important chief. Goods are displayed on a table—notice the figure decorations. 3. Grave of a poor man—broken umbrella, a cloth and a few bottles. The spirits of these things are supposed to go to their former owners in the spirit land.



Salvador) to attend the funeral of a man who had died about thirteen years before I received the invitation to be present at his interment. Nearly a thousand persons were present at the ceremony, which after the first day became a series of wild, drunken orgies. This man Gazia was the slave of the chief of Mputu. In his early life he had visited St. Paul de Loando, where he had gained some knowledge of the Portuguese language, and also some insight into the ceremonies and rites of the Roman Catholic Church. On returning to Mputu he taught Portuguese there, and at San Salvador, and acted also as a sort of priest. As a teacher he was successful, for in 1878 (when our mission began), there were many natives who could talk Portuguese. As a priest the following seems to have been his practice: at certain times of the year the natives took to Gazia's fetish house (*nzo a nkisi*), in his enclosure, baskets of various kinds of foods, and when the house was full of these offerings Gazia then prayed to the fetish on behalf of the people, and as his fee he took the offerings made to the fetish.

Gazia became so rich that his wealth aroused the cupidity of the chief, his master, who accused him of witchcraft; and to escape this charge he fled to the King at San Salvador, and became a kind of secretary, or adviser to him in his dealings with the Portuguese. When Gazia died the King had the body well dried, and bound round with twice its bulk in cloth, and sent it to his former master in Mputu to be properly buried. The body, swathed in its huge quantity of trade cloth, was placed in a house specially built, while the unfortunate master, who feared to disobey the king, gathered goats, pigs, sheep, &c., for a series of feasts worthy the burial of so great a man. The master was not over quick in burying his slave; but Gazia had left a huge amount of wealth, and the master was not only desirous of meeting the King's wishes, but he was anxious to appease the spirit of his whilom slave by burying him in grand style; and besides, if he played loosely with the wealth of a dead man, others might rob him when he was dead, and his status in the spirit land would be disagreeably affected.

The fee for digging a grave is a fowl for each of the two or three diggers. If a person dies while visiting a town, his people have to pay a pig for the right of burial in the land belonging to the town; but should the corpse be taken away, a pig must be paid to the people of every town through which it is carried. This has the effect of reducing the risks of catching infectious diseases, as the bearers, to avoid such heavy fees, will take a body to its native village by wide détours instead of over the usual paths. The body is, however, allowed to pass free if it is that of a man killed by a wild animal, or the remains of a woman who died in childbirth.

The head is always buried towards the rising sun, and the feet towards the setting sun, and the funeral takes place at sunset, for the following reason:—Every morning the men and lads leave their towns to work in the forests, or to visit and trade with neighbouring towns and villages, or to attend the markets; and the women and girls go to work on their farms, or take their goods for sale to the different markets, consequently not many people are left in the towns between sunrise and 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoons—only the small children, the aged and the sick. By 5 o'clock the inhabitants are back in their towns, and any person arriving about that time is sure to find the people at home, and will receive a welcome from them, whereas earlier in the day he would find an almost empty town. They think that the spirit town is conducted on very much the same lines as their mundane ones, and if they bury their deceased relative during the morning or early afternoon there will be very few, if any, folk to welcome him to the spirit town, hence they bury their dead about sunset. The body is taken out by the ordinary door of the house, and prepared for burial outside. While the body of a deceased father is being wrapped round and round with cloth, four yards of the burial cloth are torn off and given to each child, and that cloth is for “mourning for the father” (*mvindu a ese*=dirt for the father, *i.e.* putting on dirt for the father); and those four yards each are all that the children inherit, no matter how wealthy their father might be.

An ordinary person's body is carried more or less direct to the grave from the house; but a chief's body is carried over all the paths of the town, before the fronts of all the houses, for his spirit to say good-bye to everybody in the town. The owner of each house has to fire a salute as the corpse passes. Sometimes the men carrying the corpse pretend that it will not leave the town, and a sham struggle ensues between them and the body to get it to the burial-place.

Makitu, a great chief of the Ngombe Lutete district, died and was buried in 1898. His coffin rested on three pieces of ivory cut from one tusk which he had saved for many years for this purpose. One loaded gun was buried with him, so that, when he arrived in the "spirit forest," he could shoot the witch (*ndoki*) who had caused his death. The family intended to bury two women and one man alive in the grave, but this was prevented by the missionaries who were living close by: however, it is still uncertain whether one woman, who was missed about the time of the funeral, was not actually buried with the corpse. As regards the ivory and other things put in the grave, and on it also, the natives believe that only the shell (*evuvu*), or semblance is left there. If any person removed the ivory and succeeded in selling it, he would thus prove himself to be a witch, since he was able to convert the semblance into real ivory. Similarly, if a person took a plate, a bottle, or a mug, from a grave and was able to use it, this would be regarded as an undeniable proof that he was a witch. Such a thief would in the old days have been killed immediately, and his, or her, blood poured on the grave to appease the robbed and wrathful spirit. In the olden times slaves were killed, and their blood poured on the graves of their master; and slaves and wives also were buried in his grave to accompany their master, and husband, on his lonely road to the "spirit town" in the great and mysterious forest.

When a chief died in French Congo, just on the other side of the river from the Ngombe Lutete district, in November 1908, his coffin, made by a native carpenter of my acquaintance, measured 12 feet by 3 feet 6 inches, and was 4 feet deep.

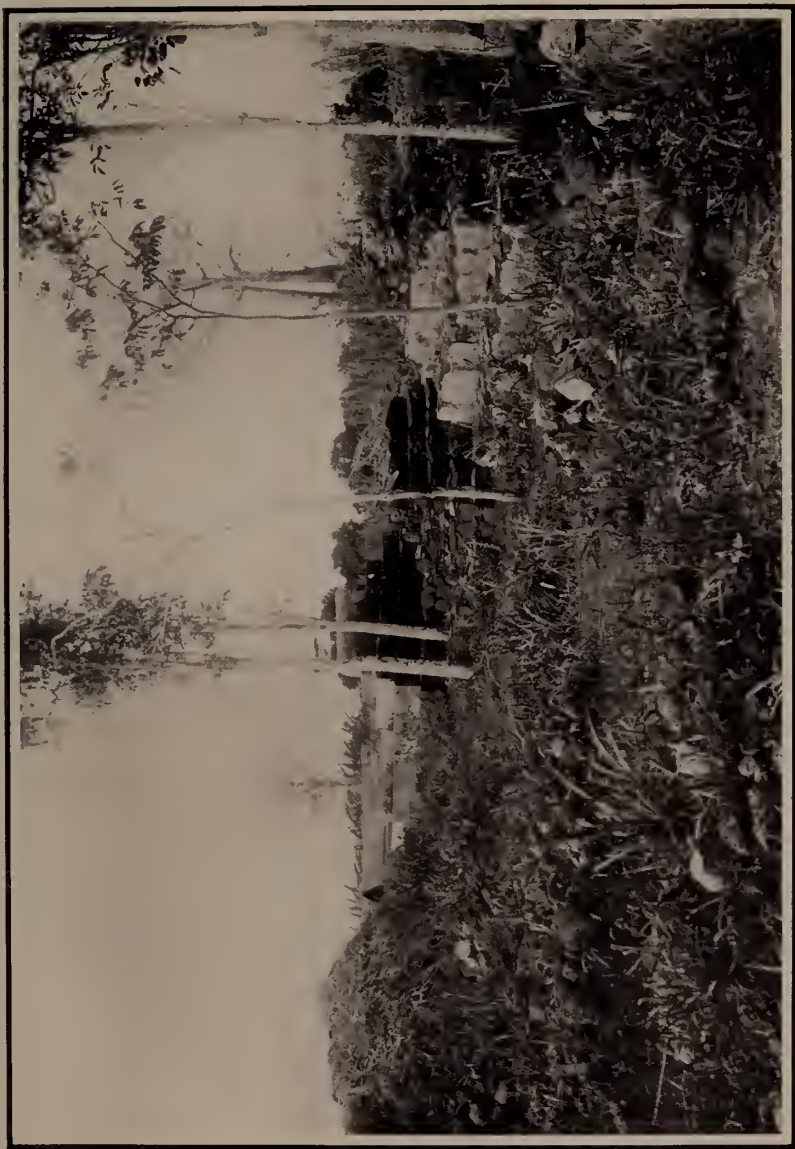


As he had no heirs, all his trade goods and various kinds of property, except enough to pay his funeral expenses, were heaped on the body, or rammed into the coffin. A native brickmaker and bricklayer, whom I knew well, received an order to make three thousand bricks to build a vault and floor the grave. This flooring of the grave was intended to avert the sinking of the body into the earth, which is thought to happen when the earth sinks on a grave. Sometimes huts are built over the grave, and articles are arranged on tables; at other times the things are placed on the grave, unprotected by any covering, but these things are generally broken, *i.e.* killed, that their spirits may go to their former owner in the spirit town.

A baby is always buried near the house of its mother, never in the bush. They think that if the child is not buried thus, its mother will be unlucky and never have any more children. Perhaps the burying of the child near its parent's house helps to keep alive the maternal instinct, which results in the bereaved mother bearing another child.

Those who dig a grave must go straight to running water and wash themselves all over; and those who have handled the body, preparing it for burial, must wash their hands and arms. Those who dug the grave or touched the corpse cross their outstretched arms until they have washed. It is a sign that they are unclean, and no one will want to approach them or salute them until they have purified themselves.

If it is the woman's *first husband* who has died, she must take his bed, and one or two articles he commonly used, to a running stream. The bed is put in the middle of the stream, and the articles placed on it. The woman washes herself well in the stream, and afterwards sits on the bed. The medicine-man goes to her and dips her three times in the water, and dresses her. Then the bed and articles are broken, and the pieces thrown down-stream to float away. She is now led out of the stream, and a raw egg is broken and given to her to swallow. A toad is killed and some of its blood is rubbed on her lips, and a fowl is killed and hung by the roadside. These sacrifices having been made to the spirit of the departed one, she is free to



### TOMBS OF THE KINGS OF KONGO

These are just outside San Salvador, and near the ruins of the ancient cathedral. For a time a house is built over the grave, as seen in the background; but after some years this is neglected, and the tropical storms and rains soon destroy the house, and reduce the graves to ruins.



return to her town. On arriving there, she sits on the ground and stretches her legs before her, and her deceased husband's brother steps over them. She is now purified, and will be free to marry when the time of her widowhood is completed. This period of mourning or widowhood lasts from one to two years, according to the importance of her husband in the town and district. These ceremonies are not observed after the death of any but the first husband, and then they must be strictly carried out to the very letter, or no other man will desire to marry her.

For a man who has lost his *first wife*, a somewhat elaborate ceremony is gone through. He must call a certain kind of medicine-man (the *ngang' a lufwalakazi*<sup>1</sup>), who gives him a raw egg to swallow. The bereaved husband then enters his house, and for six days comes out only at night. He may sleep only on a palm-basket, *i.e.* a basket made by roughly plaiting two palm fronds together. At dawn on the seventh day the male relatives of the deceased woman arrive to escort him to a running stream, carrying with him his basket bed. On arrival at the stream, one of the relatives takes the bed and throws it into the water, scrapes his tongue, shaves him, pares his nails, makes three cuts on his arm, and finally immerses him three times in the river, to "wash away the death." The widower then returns to the town, and a cock and hen are killed and cooked, and eaten by the relatives of the deceased—the males eating the cock, and the females the hen. The greatest care must be taken not to break a single bone of either fowl. Palm wine is plentifully drunk, and the bereaved is rubbed with oil and camwood powder.

At sundown the bones of the fowls are collected and tied in a palm leaflet, and buried at the base of a young palm tree. From those who are present the medicine-man selects the men and women who have never been bereaved of husband or wife, and these have to tread in the earth firmly over the buried fowl bones. Those who thus tread in the bones have a taboo

<sup>1</sup> *Lufwalakazi* is probably *lufwa lua (n) kazi*, from *lufwa* (= *fwa* = to die) death, *lua* = of, *nkazi* = wife and husband.

put upon them that they are not to eat palm nuts or anything made from them, until a child is born to each of them. A pumpkin seed is added to the charms already worn by the widower, and three fibre cloths, dyed black, are put about his waist, and thus all the evil spells are broken. The man need not wait a year or two, as the widow does, but can marry as soon as the wife is buried and the above rites are performed. He must observe them, as otherwise no woman would dare to marry him. When he returned to the town his deceased wife's sister stepped over his outstretched legs. The medicine-man receives as his fee a demijohn or large bottle of palm wine, and from fifty to one hundred strings of blue pipe beads.

A person killed by lightning is buried at the cross roads, as he (or she) is supposed to have been slain by the *nzaji*<sup>1</sup> fetish, how controls the lightning. In fact all those persons who are killed in one way or another by this fetish are treated in the same way, *e.g.* a man who bleeds from the mouth and nose (probably due to the bursting of a bloodvessel) is said to be killed by the *nzaji* fetish, and his corpse is put into a grave by the roadside, and two stakes are driven into him—one through the chest, and the other through the stomach. The man who has a skin disease called "the fire of God" (*tiya twa Nzambi*), in which the skin puckers up and blisters as though burnt, is thought to be under the ban of the *nzaji* fetish, and when he dies he is buried at, or near, a cross road. The diseases, and death by lightning, inflicted by the *nzaji* fetish are especially for stealing, but not solely for this crime; and a person who dies by lightning, or by a *nzaji* sickness, is regarded as a very bad person, and his body must not be buried with those belonging to respectable folk.

Suicide was not common, but occasionally we heard of a man or woman taking his or her life, and such were buried at cross roads or thrown into the bush. The following case came under my notice: a man living at Nkondo, a village in the Ngombe Lutete district, was very ill, in fact near to death, and did not desire to leave his property—trade goods, cloths, guns,

<sup>1</sup> See Description of Fetishes, p. 222.



gunpowder, &c.—to his relatives, for he regarded them with much hatred. So he made up his mind to burn down the house containing his goods. He waited for an opportunity, and one night when five persons—three adults and two children—were sleeping in the house, he locked the door, set fire to the structure, and rolled himself in his blanket to await the end. The dry grass of the hut burned like tinder, and the powder, catching fire, caused a tremendous explosion. Only one man escaped. The family of the two children demanded, and received, compensation for their death from the suicide's family. The adults who were killed belonged to his family. Whatever the reason for his grievance against his family, he had a terrible revenge. He was buried without any ceremony, as a suicide, at the cross roads.

As we have watched the dancing, drinking, gun-firing, and have listened to the drumming and chanting of the mournful dirges, we have asked ourselves again and again, Is there any real sorrow for the death of the person whose obsequies are filling the village with hideous noises? and as we have looked on the perspiring dancers, and the crowd of boozing, feasting men and women, bent on enjoying themselves, and eagerly getting as much amusement as they could out of the passing event, we have had to answer, No, that is not true grief; but when we have peered into the hut, or gone to the back of it, and seen two or three woe-begone, huddled figures with their tear-stained faces, we have forgotten the laughing, joking crowd, we have become suddenly deaf to the songs and chants of the professional mourners, for here is sorrow as true and sincere as ever pierced the hearts of those with white skins; and our heart going out to them in sympathy, we have removed our helmet and sat down to mourn with the mourners, and our sympathy has never been refused.

## CHAPTER XXV

### RELIGIOUS BELIEFS<sup>1</sup>

THE name for a Supreme Being (*Nzambi*) is known all over the Lower Congo, and indeed among all the tribes throughout the watershed of the Congo River; but the knowledge concerning Him is very vague. He is regarded as the principal creator of the world and all living creatures; and it is thought that after His work of creation He withdrew Himself, and, since then, He has taken little, if any further interest in the world and its inhabitants. He is spoken of among the natives as being strong, rich, and good—so good that He will not hurt them, hence no sacrifices are offered to Him, no prayers to Him ever pass their lips, and they never worship Him. As the Supreme One He is very remote from them, unconcerned in their welfare, and harmless, therefore they consider that there is no need for them to trouble about Him. We never found an atheist among them, but their theism is of a very hazy quality.

*Nkadi a Mpemba*<sup>2</sup> is thought to be the source and fount of all evil, and it is said that it lives with the witches (*ndoki*), and that all the witchcraft really comes from this power; in fact, in some districts *Nkadi a Mpemba* and *ndoki* are interchangeable terms. This power is more feared than *Nzambi*, and because of its cruel, malignant nature it is necessary to

<sup>1</sup> This chapter should be read in conjunction with the chapter on "Religious Beliefs" in the author's book *Among Congo Cannibals*, pp. 246-260. That chapter and this one are complementary to each other.

<sup>2</sup> I have avoided the use of the word devil as a translation of this name as it connotes too much in our language. Perhaps demon would be a fairly good equivalent for this name for the source of evil, but it is a demon that can be soothed, appeased, and helpful to those who know how to deal with it.

appease it. All their fetishes, charms, medicine-men, together with their sacrifices of fowls and goats, are either to circumvent this influence, or to appease it in such a way as to gain its goodwill. The word *nkadi* means that power that is regarded as the origin and fount of all evil, and *mpemba* means chalk. Now chalk is used largely in the making of their charms, and it is rubbed on the bodies of the medicine-men when they are performing their ceremonies and incantations. Sometimes the whole face is covered with it, and broad bands are drawn down the arms and across the chest. Is this word for the origin of evil simply the *evil influence of the chalk*, i.e. the evil power that covers itself with chalk as a sign that it is the chief of all evil powers? Or is it that power which freely uses chalk as a charm to make itself more powerful in bewitching folk? Those who desire to counteract its evil influence, or win its favour, use chalk as a part of their charm-making, and also as a part of their decoration while working their spells. It is the custom to employ a bit of a fetish charm to remove the malignant influence of the same fetish, and a part of a person—hair, nail-parings, saliva, &c.—to procure a controlling influence for good or evil over them; and do the medicine-men use chalk in their charms and on their persons, to gain power over this origin and source of all evil, the *Nkadi a Mpemba*? It is very probable that the Congo man's devil is one whitened with chalk, i.e. a white devil. Certainly a black face thus whitened is very hideous, and is enough to strike terror to the heart of any native.

The natives never try to recall the spirit of a dead person, but they ask why it left them. They give the departing one messages to carry to their deceased relatives in the great forest town where the dead are supposed to congregate. On the other hand, when a person sneezes, another sitting by says, "Come quickly" (*sazuka*); and when a baby sneezes the mother calls out, "Come back quickly"; for they think that the spirit leaves the body in sneezing, and they thus enjoin its immediate return. The spirit of the deceased is supposed to hover about, or in, the corpse until it is buried; and some-

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times through the swelling of the body, from putrefaction, the strings and bands round it crack and break. When the mourners hear these noises they rush helter-skelter out of the hut in great alarm, thinking that the spirit is about to raise the person again to life, thus indicating that the spirit is believed to be in or near the unburied corpse.

The grand funeral is to satisfy the departed spirit that it is properly respected, and to please it, that it may not return to bewitch with sickness, misfortune, and death those who are left behind. The man while alive, and his spirit when he is dead, desire above all things a grand entrance into the spirit world—plenty of gun-firing, shouting, trumpet-blowing, and women musically wailing, so that the spirits will say (to put it in the words of a native), “Hullo, who is this coming, about whom they are making so much noise”; and they will gather to see who it is and welcome the spirit. Thus the status of the departed one in the next world depends on his family burying him grandly, and their comfort in this world depends on burying with the corpse, and expending on the funeral festivities, that portion of the deceased’s wealth which he set aside for this specific purpose, otherwise he will return to haunt them with witchcraft in one or other of its many forms.

It is generally believed that when a person dies his spirit goes to reside in a great, mysterious forest; and if it is the spirit of a bad person then it becomes an evil spirit (*nkwiya*): and it is commonly believed that in this forest the spirits have a great town, where they eat, drink, marry, continue their family and clan relationships, and act as in their former earthly life. The spirit (*mwanda*) is able to leave the forest and visit the mundane towns. The spirit, however, that visits the former scenes of its life on earth, only to work havoc on the living members of its family, is considered to be a bad spirit (*nkwiya*), as good spirits never leave their forest abode to wander about troubling the living. The living are unable to visit this forest town, as they do not know the road, which only the dead can find and follow.

Running conjointly with this view is another which is held

by many, and sometimes both views are accepted by one and the same person: that the sun is the place of punishment for bad spirits. When a native wants to punish a child he puts it to stand in the strong sun, and men and women are often tied in the scorching sun as a penalty for wrong doing. The moon is supposed to be the place where good spirits converse (*moka*) with one another. After death they say there is a branching of the roads (*mavamba ma njila*), one leading to the sun and the other to the moon. The spirits of bad folk always take the former, and those of the good take the latter road. When there is a halo round the sun they point to it as a proof that a "judgment court" (*mbaji a nkanu*) is being held there, and the punishment allotted to the bad is being confirmed (*sikidiswa*) by the Supreme Being (*Nzambi*); and should this halo appear about the time of a death the relatives of the deceased will wail long and loudly because their departed one has gone to be punished; and I have known women return from their farms when they have seen a halo round the sun: for the thought of the punishment being inflicted on the known or unknown dead was too much for them and thoroughly unnerved them. But when the circle is seen round the moon the "judgment court" is being held there, and the reward is being confirmed to the good, and the family that has buried a deceased relative about that time is very happy; and the lunar halo is also accounted for by the good spirits sitting in crowds holding a palaver, or conversing. Shooting stars and comets are regarded as bad spirits (*matombola*), and they can fall on people and entering them change them into witches (*ndoki*); and in this they are sometimes thought to be bad spirits that have broken away from the sun. We shall refer later to this kind of spirit.

It will be observed that the sun and moon theory, as the places of punishment and reward, is opposed to their beliefs concerning the great spirit town in the forests described above. I am inclined to believe that the sun and moon theory may be a corruption of ancient Roman Catholic teaching on purgatory, &c., and that the spirit town in the forest is the original native



belief. Sometimes a curious mixture of both ideas will be found co-existing in the native mind ; *e.g.* if, as often happens, there is no halo round either the sun or the moon for many weeks, the persons buried during that time are regarded as neither very good nor very bad, and are therefore believed to have gone, not to the sun or the moon, but to the forest spirit-town ; and it is the spirits of such that are supposed to be sometimes reincarnated in their infants. While there is a very general belief in reincarnation of the soul (this is referred to more fully in the chapter on Birth and Childhood), there is no idea of resurrection to be found among them ; but there is also a strong and wide belief in the continuity and personal identity of the spirit after death.

But it is possible for the living to destroy the spirit of the dead, and this is done when a spirit (*mwanda*) becomes an evil spirit (*nkwiya*) that bewitches those members of its family who are still living on the earth. When the family of a dead and buried man has much and frequent sickness and misfortune, and all other means having failed to cure them or bring better luck, they dig up the corpse and burn it, thinking that its spirit is a witch that is desirous of malevolently catching the members of its family and taking them to the forest town. By burning the corpse they think the spirit is destroyed,<sup>1</sup> and an end put to its evil machinations. It is not supposed that the witch killed, cooked, and ate its victim, but that it took its victim for a reason of its own to the spirit town. These evil spirits operate through the living on the living, and the ordeal is given to persons suspected of witchcraft to discover if such spirits are operating through them. Their anger is first against the evil spirit (*nkwiya*), and then against the medium (*ndoki*), and their desire is to kill the medium so as to drive the spirit back to its dark, forest abode. It is possible for a person to be a medium and not know it, and the purpose of the ordeal is to find out whether or not the accused person is being used as such. The plea of ignorance will not save the detected witch

<sup>1</sup> See p. 243 for other methods of destroying the spirits of the dead that are accused of witchcraft by the medicine-men.

from death, because if a person can unconsciously be used once, he will on another occasion become the medium of another, or the same, evil spirit. Besides, who among a people with such uncontrolled passions and such lax principles has not wished at one time or other for the death of this or that member of their family, and thus become a suitable medium through whom the evil spirit (*nkwiya*) could operate?

The shooting stars (*nienie*) are believed to be spirits (*matombola*) travelling or playing about in the sky, and anyone seeing them will rush into his house from fear of one of them falling on and entering him. Mothers will not allow their children to remain out of the house when there are shooting stars about, lest one of them should enter her child. The word *matombola* comes from *tomba* = to ascend, and it is thought that these spirits have ascended from the graves—mouse-holes are regarded as their exits. Having ascended from the graves, they are now looking out for bodies into which they can enter, and entering they become evil spirits (*nkwiya*), and the source of various kinds of witchcraft; and as no one wants to be a witch they get out of the way of shooting stars as quickly as possible. These *matombola* do not confine themselves to shooting stars, but wander in the forest and enter folk by other means, hence we hear of them, in the account of the secret society of the Country-of-the-dead, as taking away some of its members (see page 162). They also come out of the graves to steal fowls, &c., and cause other kinds of mischief.

We have then the spirit (*mwanda*) that hovers about the deceased until buried, and then goes off to the forest town of spirits, or either to the sun or to the moon, and can become an evil spirit (*nkwiya*) working witchcraft through a medium (*ndoki*); and the spirits (*matombola*) that come from graves, and show themselves to be evil spirits (*nkwiya*) by entering folk; and the person who is possessed by either of these kinds of spirits becomes a witch (*ndoki*) who causes sickness, ill-fortune, and death. Believing as they do that by burning the body the spirit is destroyed, one is surprised that they do not burn every corpse, and thus not only save the trouble of

burying, and the waste of the enormous wealth put in the graves, but also end ninety per cent. of their witchcraft that is supposed to be rampant through the evil machinations of bad spirits. This they probably would do, but annihilation is utterly repugnant to them, for they know that the measure they meted out to others would also be meted out to them on death, hence they refrain from burning a body, or trying in other ways to kill the spirit, until such extreme measures have been ordered by a witch-doctor.

There is an earnest desire on the part of the natives to live for ever in this world ; and to obtain this end they are willing to try the suggestions of any pretender who comes along with a plausible tongue. The following incident well illustrates their desire for life. It is taken from Dr. Bentley's Appendix to the *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language*, page 848, under the word *Kinyambi*: "In the year 1885 there appeared in Kongo people from Luanda, or thereabouts, telling the following story: a man caught a fish, and was proceeding to kill it, when the fish begged him not to do so, for anyone drinking the water which came from its mouth, or in which it had remained for any time, would never die by fair means or from natural causes; only by witchcraft could their death be accomplished. This water was hawked about the country, and believed in very thoroughly by great numbers, even in San Salvador itself. It really promised very little when the firm native belief in witchcraft is remembered; it was nevertheless a great success as a means of duping the ignorant, foolish people. When it was seen that the purchasers died like ordinary mortals the traffic ceased."

It is thought that in dreams the spirit (*mwanda*) of the dreamer leaves the body and visits the persons and places seen in the dream. Should they, while asleep and dreaming, see any one, they think that that person's spirit has left its body to visit them, and they regard the person thus seen as a witch who has come to squeeze (*fina*) the life out of them while asleep. Hence, if a man has a nightmare in which he dreams that someone tries to choke him, he will grunt, snort, and waken

with a start, persuaded that he has been attacked by a witch. Sometimes in a nightmare they see curious shapes, and for this power they employ the words *fina* and *bolota*, which mean that the witch (*ndoki*) has transformed itself into some weird form, and sitting on a beam of its victim's house, it sings and gloats over its sleeping prey; it brings the influence of its black art, the working of its spell, the squeezing out, the throttling, of its victim's life, the "eating of his heart," and all the horrors of bewitchment. Sick persons, after dreaming that they have seen a person whom they recognise, will accuse him of witchcraft, and such a charge has often led to the ordeal and death. To avoid dreams, *i.e.* to keep their spirit from wandering about at night, they will take a piece of lighted wood, and spitting on it three times, they wave it three times round the head and throw it beyond their feet as they lie on their bed, believing that the dream will be buried beneath the ashes of the burning wood.

I do not think that these people believe in what is called a "compound soul," or dual spirit, "one element of which leaves the body during dreams, and the other only leaves at death." Any native will tell you he has a body (*nito*), life (*moyo*), and a spirit, or soul (*mwanda*). It is the *mwanda* that is supposed to leave the body during dreams, but during the dream time the person has life, *i.e.* the *moyo* remains with him. Life (*moyo*) is always used as the antithesis of death (*mfwa*). Trees, vegetables, and animals have *moyo* while alive, and when dead, they say as we do, "The life is gone" (*moyo ukatukidi*). Only the *nkasa* tree, the bark of which is used for the ordeal, is believed to have a spirit (*mwanda*), and only very tame dogs and pigs, that follow their masters about, and come at their slightest call, are said to have a spirit (*mwanda*); and I therefore think that *moyo* is simply life, or the principle of life, and is not to be regarded as one element of the "compound soul."

With regard to the beliefs of the people, there are as many variations in their statements as there are individuals. Having no fixed standard, no written creed, no catechism, no court of appeal in matters of faith and practice, everyone is a law

unto himself. There is, however, one thing in which all natives must believe, viz. an occult power called *loka*, to bewitch, the person possessing it being the witch, or *ndoki*. This power is always malignant, and the supposed possessor of it is always hunted to death; and the ordeal test by *nkasa* bark is firmly believed to be the most sure way of discovering the witchcraft in the witch. For a person to scout the idea of there being such a power as *loka*, and to sneer at the ordeal being able to detect the witch, is to prove beyond doubt that he himself is a witch, and the sooner he is killed and out of the way the better it will be for the community.

The belief in witchcraft affects their whole life, and touches them socially at a hundred different points. It regulates their actions, modifies their mode of thought and speech, controls their conduct towards each other, causes cruelty and callousness in a people not naturally cruel, and sets the various members of a family against each other. A man may believe any theory he likes about creation, about the Supreme Being, and about the abode of the departed spirits; but he must believe in witches and their power for evil, and must in unmistakable terms give expression to that belief, or be accused of witchcraft himself. A man may be a devoted believer in charms and fetishes, he may decorate his person, his house, his children, his pigs, his goats, and his dogs with as many charms as he can afford to buy, or he may leave all the charms and fetishes severely alone, and no one will think the better or worse of him; but he must believe in witchcraft, and in witches and their horrible power, or his life will be made wretched with accusations of witchcraft. But for witchcraft no one would die, and the earnest longing of all right-minded men and women is to clear it out of the country by killing every detected witch. This hunting out the witch, this tracking down of the evil thing, is open to all kinds of abuses, affording many opportunities to chiefs, to medicine-men, and to others to clear an enemy out of the way; nevertheless at the bottom of it all is the desire to end that which is causing deaths daily and filling the land with sorrow and tears. Belief in witchcraft and in



witches is interwoven into the very fibre of every Congo-speaking man and woman, and the person who does not believe in them is a monster, a witch, to be killed without scruple at the earliest opportunity.

Another essential tenet of native faith is a firm belief in the *nkasa* ordeal, and that it has such detective power that an accused person taking it is either honoured or cruelly murdered, according to the effect the drug has on his stomach in causing vomiting or otherwise. The man who expresses his doubts about the effectiveness of this ordeal does so at the risk of his life.

A man may believe or disbelieve in medicine-men and witch-doctors without dire consequences necessarily resulting from his scepticism; he may snub a witch-doctor and talk slightly of his charms, his fetishes, and his power; he may pass one by to call in a distant medicine-man, and suffer no inconvenience from his sneering attitude towards one or twenty of the fetish-men; but he must believe in witchcraft and the ordeal. The village witch-doctor is seldom, if ever, engaged by the natives of the village in which he lives. They know too much about him to waste their money on him. They see him repairing his charms and fetishes from the depredations of rats, cockroaches, and white ants; they know his fetish power and his charms are unable to keep him, his wives, his children, or even his goats, pigs, and dogs in good health; so they flout him and send for the medicine-man of another village of whom they know little or nothing. Therefore a faith in all witch-doctors is not a necessary part of their creed.

Their fetishes are very numerous, but no one man believes in them all. Each native has his own particular few, which he regards with awe and respect, sprinkles with fowl's or goat's blood, and patronises in a general sort of way. All others he regards with more or less contempt. If everyone had firm faith in everybody else's fetishes as well as in his own the Congo would be a paradise. There would be no lying, no thieving, no adultery, &c., for there are many fetishes to expose liars, thieves, and adulterers, and it is because they have no faith

in those fetishes that untruthfulness, robbery, and immorality abound. It would be extremely difficult to find a person, man or woman, who has not been guilty of all three. On the other hand, there are fetishes to preserve the thief and liar from detection, and fetishes to preserve the doer of every kind of evil from exposure and its consequences. If a man thieves and is not found out, well, his fetish is powerful and helps him; if he is caught, well, the other man has the stronger fetish. Thus a man must believe in witches, witchcraft, and the ordeal, but he is not bound to believe in every kind of fetish or charm, though he generally pins his faith to a few; neither is he forced to receive all witch-doctors at their own valuation, but he believes one here and there has the power to which he lays claim.

The natives have no theory about the origin of things, not even legends of the ancient ones who gave birth to their forefathers and were the originators of their tribes and clans.

The sun and moon once met together, they say, and the sun plastered some mud over a part of the moon, and thus covered up some of the light, and that is why a portion of the moon is often in shadow. When this meeting took place there was a flood, and the ancient people put their porridge (*luku*) sticks to their backs and turned into monkeys. The present race of people is a new creation. Another statement is that when the flood came the men turned into monkeys, and the women into lizards: and the monkey's tail is the man's gun. One would think from this that the transformation took place, in their opinion, in very recent times; but the Congo native has no legend concerning the introduction of the gun into their country, nor any rumours of the time when hunting and fighting were carried on with spears, shields, bows and arrows, and knives.

The sky is supposed to be like the ceiling of a house, and that far away there are posts supporting this ceiling; and lads who have travelled to England are frequently asked if they have seen the pillars that support the sky. Above the sky, or this ceiling, is a river which frequently wears away its bed and



*Photo by*

*Rev. F. Oldrieve*

#### ANIMAL FETISH WITH HUMAN HEAD

Fetishes are usually made to represent men or women; but this one has the body of an animal and the head of a man—a most uncommon form. Found in Ngombe Lutete district.



*Photo by*

*Dr. Mercier Gamble*

#### MAIN ROAD NEAR SAN SALVADOR

A white umbrella is standing among the grass in the narrow road. This is the kind of bush grass through which the traveller must push his way when passing across the country. The bush grass is fired every season for hunting purposes.



comes through in the form of rain. The thunder is the voice of the great fetish called *Nzaji*, and the lightening is *Nzaji* itself. The sun sets every evening in the sea, but during the night, while they are sleeping, it steals back to the east ready to rise in the morning.

The native pure and simple is the plaything of omens, warnings, dreams, auguries, and suchlike prognostications of good and evil. He may occasionally be inclined to disregard them, but he is not allowed to do so by his friends. If the omen is against him, and he will not take warning, his comrades and relatives will use physical force to save him from himself. If the omen indicates that he will be killed in the coming fight, or die on the trading expedition, and he wishes in spite of the augury to go, his friends will securely tie him with ropes and lock him in a house to keep him from disobeying the omen.

The native is therefore influenced by belief in the following various powers, arranged in the order of their importance: 1. Witches, witchcraft, and all kinds of evil spirits. 2. Ordeal-taking to discover the witch, or to test a serious accusation of any kind. 3. Taboo, and the evil results of disregarding its prohibitions. 4. Divination by various methods. 5. Omens, good and bad. 6. *Ngangas*, i.e. medicine-men, witch-doctors, wizards, &c. 7. Fetishes and charms. About these seven things there are fairly definite and almost fixed ideas generally accepted by the people; but when you come to other matters you find a veritable "olla podrida" of ideas, chaotic in the extreme, and impossible to reduce to any systematic order. The same person will tell you at different times that the departed spirit goes to a mysterious forest, or to the moon or to the sun, or it remains in the grave, or wanders about the sky as a shooting star. There is no coherence in their beliefs, and their ideas about cosmogony are very nebulous; and although they believe in punishment after death, yet their faith in this is so hazy that it has lost all deterrent power. If in these paragraphs a lack of logical unity is observed, it must be put to the debit of the native mind, and that lack of unity really represents the mistiness of their views.



From the preceding paragraphs the reader can gather what a Lower Congo native must believe in order to live a quiet, unpersecuted life, and also those matters about which he may show utter indifference without any risk of being regarded as a monster worthy of death.

In this statement of native beliefs I have tried to reflect the native mind. It would have been possible to have left out ideas here and there, and to have arranged the rest in such a manner that they would have dove-tailed beautifully, but in so doing I should have given my view of the religious beliefs of the natives, not a faithful account of theirs. There is, however, a unanimity of belief among all Congo tribes, both on the Upper and Lower Congo, on the following points: a belief in a Supreme Being; a knowledge of right and wrong; a firm conviction in the continuance and identity of a person's spirit after death; a belief in punishment after death; a hazy belief in rebirth in infants, but no knowledge of a resurrection.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### POT POURRI

UNDER this heading we desire to relate a number of customs, superstitions, and incidents that, for various reasons, have not been included in the previous chapters; but which we hope will throw further light on the black man, and his strange ways, and his peculiar outlook on life.

I transcribe an excerpt from a letter that I wrote in Aug. 1882, when I was alone at San Salvador, and quite new to the people. "On August 1, from 10 to 12.30 fifty carriers arrived, their names were taken down, their loads carefully examined to see that they had not been opened *en route*, and stored in their several places. After mid-day 'chop,' it was my sorrowful duty to pay them the amount due for carrying the loads from Musuku to our station—a five days' journey. They had each to receive about the value of 3*s.* 6*d.* or 4*s.*, and there is no small fuss when they receive their pay. Imagine the dining-room in our house; on the table is a display of a dozen varieties of trade cloths, over the back of the wicker sofa are six or seven different kinds of old soldiers' coats of various sizes, shapes, and colours, and on another table are beads, knives, looking-glasses, and other articles of barter, for we have brought out of our stores samples of everything we have in stock—specimens of all our 'money'; and I am seated near by with a list of the carriers' names in my hand.

"I call out several names, and at last some one responds and enters the house, and the door is closed on him. I tell him the prices of the cloths, &c. He looks around him for a few minutes, and walks deliberately out of the house without receiving his pay, but as he goes he mutters that the cloth is bad and dear; yet my predecessors have used similar cloths

for the last four years, and have given the same quantity per load as I am offering. Can you imagine fifty men all trying to be heard at once, all acting as though they were mad with rage, gesticulating wildly, all asking outrageous prices, all wanting twice the amount agreed upon, and demanding it with threats thrown out in the loudest voices. Finding, however, that they exhaust themselves, and I concede nothing, they quieten down, and when there is a lull in the Babel, I call another name, the owner of which steps into the house. He is a facetious young man, a dandy, and wishes for a soldier's coat. He tries first one and then another until he has handled all of them, wasting the time while there are fifty men clamouring for pay outside the door. I lose patience with him, and calling on him to take one quickly or go without, he picks up one and leaves the place.

"Now that one has taken his pay they all desire to be paid at once, consequently they answer quickly to their names, choose their cloth without delay, and leave the house. Before they went down for a load they knew what cloths we had, their prices, &c., or they would not have gone for a load, and on the road they talk about the kind of cloth they are going to draw. There are some who have not decided what to take, and they aggravate the white man by turning over all the cloths, like thoughtless women in a draper's shop. There are others who want to be paid before their turn, so they would crowd into the house every time the door was open, and have to be driven out to await their turn. At last they are all paid and gone. Now if I were to send next week to these men and say that I wanted fifty carriers, most, if not all, would go down to the river again, and bringing up another load each, they would repeat over again what I have tried to describe above."

I found afterwards that on their way back to San Salvador, knowing that I was but a young man, and finding that I was alone (my colleague having left to visit another part of the country), they decided to try to bluff me into paying more per load; but failing, their efforts in that direction gradually wore away, and they would at last come one after the other, quickly take their pay, and go, greeting me with a "Stop well"



*Lent by*

*Sir H. Johnston, G.C.M.G.*

#### LOWER CONGO POTTERY

These large pots are used for palm-wine and native beer. No wheel is employed when moulding the pots. After drying they are fired, and some are glazed, while hot, with gum copal.



*Photo by*

*Rev. J. S. Bowskill*

#### WASHING A CHILD

When the village is far from a stream, and water is scarce, the child is seated in a bowl and water poured over it from a calabash. If an infant is to be washed, it is held by one hand, and water, from a saucepan, is thrown over it with the other hand.





(*sala kiambote*) as they left the house. I have found it wisest to state a fair price for work, for carrying, and for fowls, goats, &c., and not alter it; and when the natives know that you have only "one mouth," they will either accept your price, or leave without worrying you half a day to give another penny for the article. You may very occasionally lose something that you want, but you will save much time, and temper, and considerably increase the number of your real working hours.

The "evil eye" is supposed to receive its power from a fetish called *ezau* (from *zaula*=to scoop away). A woman whom I knew in the Ngombe Lutete district, who was not ready to gather the peanuts from her farm, successfully objected to the other women gathering their peanuts, although they were quite ripe for harvesting, lest they put the "evil eye" (*ezau*) on her patch, and thus destroyed the possibility of a good yield. She believed that they had the power, by using the "evil eye," to draw the nuts underground from her field to theirs; and they also think that the "evil eye" can draw cloth, &c., out of one house to another, or by the use of it the owner of the "evil eye" can put a ban on the goods of others, and thus become rich by their misfortunes.

The ingredients of the "evil eye" charm are known only to the maker and user, and the possession of such a charm is, of course, a secret, as those thought to be in possession of one are quickly accused of witchcraft. The possessor of such a charm can even call away the soul of an enemy, and the soulless one will soon die. A very similar fetish to the "evil eye" is that of *mbambudi* (from *bambula*=to deflect, to transfer in a mysterious way); and the owner of this fetish is supposed to have the power of causing farm produce to leave an enemy's farm and go to that belonging to the owner of this charm, or client of the medicine-man of this cult (*ngang' a mbambudi*). Fruit is also mysteriously stripped from the enemy's tree, and made to hang from the trees of others. Trade goods can be spirited from one house to another; and anyone known to possess this charm on him is not allowed to stay or sleep in a strange town, as the people fear its power. This and the "evil

eye" fetish are both nullified by using the "to-morrow" (*kimbaji-mbaji*) charm. This charm is made by the medicine-man (*ngang' a kimbaji-mbaji*) by putting various herbs into a uni-valve shell. When a person feels under the power of the "evil eye," she sends for the medicine-man who owns a strong "to-morrow" fetish to make her a protective charm, which he does by ramming the herbs into a shell, and killing a fowl, and putting some of its blood into the shell, he marks a cross on it with chalk, and then placing it on the ground with eight heaps of gunpowder round it, he then explodes the powder, blows his whistle vigorously, and thus arouses the charm to work effectively. Sometimes by a trick he makes the shell move along the path, to the astonishment of all present. After this anyone who desires to do harm to the person under the protection of this charm always puts off committing the evil until to-morrow, and thus the charm-protected person is never hurt, as to-morrow never comes.

It is considered extremely unlucky for a woman to count her children one, two, three, and so on, for the evil spirits will hear and take some of them away by death. The people themselves do not like to be counted; for they fear that counting will draw to them the attention of the evil spirits, and as a result of the counting some of them will soon die. In 1908 the Congo State officials, desiring to number the people for the purpose of levying a tax, sent an officer with soldiers to count them. The natives would have resisted the officer, but he had too many soldiers with him; and it is not improbable that fights have taken place between whites and blacks in other parts of Africa, not that they resisted the taxation, but because they objected to be counted for fear the spirits would hear and kill them.

In the early eighties matches were scarcely known in the Congo hinterland, but flint and steel were in common use throughout the country. These were probably introduced by the early Portuguese. Before the introduction of flint and steel (*ebindwa*), there is a rumour that two pieces of wood were rubbed together to produce fire; and before that there is a

legend that fire came first from above by lightning striking a tree and setting it on fire. People will not go near a tree that has been struck by lightning, and if the tree happens to be near the road, anyone who passes it will stop and tie a single bow every time he or she goes along that road. A mother will put the grass into the hand of her child while she ties the bow. This is to avert some indefinable evil that will fall on them should they omit the observance of this rite. When palm trees and *nsafu* fruit trees are struck by lightning, no one will eat again of their fruits, and the same applies to any fruit trees. It may be that the tree struck by lightning is supposed to be under the special ban of the *nzaji* fetish, or has done something to be worthy of its punishment, hence those who can avoid the tree, and those who have to pass near the *nzaji*-cursed tree tie a single bow to avert a like misfortune from falling upon themselves.<sup>1</sup> There is another native legend that once there was no fire on the earth, and a man sent a jackal, which at that time was tame and lived in the villages, to where the sun sets to bring some fire from it, but the jackal found so many good things there that he never returned again to the abode of man. The natives say among themselves that far away to the north are whole tribes who know nothing about fire, and eat their food uncooked and their meat raw; but they themselves have never seen such folk—they have only heard about them in their talks around the evening fire.

The three stars in Orion's belt are called, "the dog, the palm-rat, and chief hunter" (*mbwa, yo nziji, yo nkongwa-mbwa*); and about these three stars, the children sing: "The Hunter follows his Dog, the Dog follows the Palm-rat, the Palm-rat goes near to the Hunter, the Hunter to whom the Gun is fixed, the Gun it kills it." Venus is named "the wife of the

<sup>1</sup> If the lightning has burnt the grass, and not touched a tree, the passer-by must tie a knot in the nearest untouched grass, or a single bow. At such places hundreds of knots and bows will be seen. A knotted string is put round the arm of the woman to ward off the curse against child-bearing. Knots are supposed to have power to guard against bad luck.

moon" (*Nkaz' a Ngonde*); and the Pleiades are regarded as "the caretakers who guard the rain" (*Ndundahunda zahunda mvula*). It is thought that the rain comes from the Pleiades, and if, at the beginning of the rainy season, this constellation is clearly seen, the natives expect a good rainy season, *i.e.* sufficient rain for their farms without a superabundance.

The water-sprites (*ximbi*) have the credit for keeping the water good and fit to drink. These sprites are said, by those who pretend to have seen them, to have short, little bodies which are of a whitish colour. They are responsible for fissures, chasms, and landslips; and are said to travel in the whirlwinds and great storms. Formerly, when a white person died in the Ngombe Lutete district, the natives said that the sprites that inhabit the local streams did not like the white people, and that was the reason why so many of them died. As snakes are to be found frequently among the stones along the banks of rivers and streams, they are, therefore, regarded as being under the special protection of these sprites, and are sometimes said to be incarnations of them. The water-sprites, according to some of the stories told about them, are thought to possess powers very similar to those with which we endow our fairies.

A large number of natives still believe that we white folk do not weave our cloth, but that the sea-sprites (*ximbi ya mbu*) weave it for us beneath the waves: and that we have found an opening leading to their oceanic factory, and, whenever we need cloth, the captain of a steamer goes to this hole (*ntumpa*) and rings a bell; and the sprites, without showing themselves, push up the end of a piece of cloth, and the captain's men pull on it, one, two, three, or more days until he has all he requires. He then throws in, as payment, a few dead bodies of black people he has bought from those bad native traders who have bewitched their people and sold them to the white men, who buy them for this purpose; and he then steams back to land; meanwhile the captain's men cut and fold the cloth into pieces, and bind it in bales. Those thrown into the sprite-hole become the slaves of the sprites, making things for them and

doing menial work. Enamel-ware, cutlery, &c. are not manufactured by white people, but are the products of black men spirited away to the countries of the white men, where they are held in dire slavery and forced to make these things. It has been often pointed out to me that cloths are too finely woven to be the work of white men with two eyes, but are made by the sea-sprites, who, having only one eye, have the sight-power of two concentrated in it, and are consequently able to weave these fine textures.

In books of travel Congo chiefs are generally held up as rapacious, greedy, and extortionate in their demands on the white men who pass their way—and such accounts have much truth on their side. I do not desire to excuse the greedy rapacity exhibited, but I should like to state fairly the reason for their insatiable demands on the white travellers who fall into their clutches. All the white men seen by natives appear to be most inordinately rich, and even a comparatively poor white man is wealthy in their eyes. Until recently, every white man on the Congo was connected with a trading company, the railway, a missionary society, or the Government, and the riches belonging to the body corporate that they represented were credited as owned, more or less, by the poorest member of their staff. They saw a white man write a letter, and in return bales of cloth, boxes of barter goods, and cases of provisions arrived. They knew nothing of payments made in the home countries. They observed the cause—a letter, and the result—the arrival of unlimited wealth.

From whence came such riches? Why, those sea-sprites weave their cloths, and they can procure as much as they care to pull up from the sea; and their resurrected relatives are slaving for the white man, making all kinds of things for him in this country, therefore they tried to get as much as they could out of the white man they happened to have in their district or village.

Is it any wonder that the chiefs and people hated the white man until they came to know him better? And, believing what they did—and a large number still hold the above views



—about the ease with which we procured our barter goods, the surprise is, not that they asked so much, but that they demanded so little! On the continent of Europe the English “milords” are mulct in many ways because they are so generally regarded as being very rich; and in Africa the chiefs have tried to mulct all white men because of their supposed enormous wealth gained so easily, and by such wicked means.

On the West Coast, a few degrees south of the Equator, the waters of the second largest river in Africa, and the sixth longest in the world, empty themselves into the Atlantic. The volume flowing from the seven-miles-wide mouth<sup>1</sup> of the Congo is so great that for over eighty miles the sea is coloured a brownish hue to the eye, and is brackish to the taste. The impetuous force of the strong current is such that only a slight appreciable difference is observed between high and low tide.

Three thousand miles away, in South Central Africa, the Congo is daily born not many miles from the sources of the Nile, and receiving tribute from the innumerable rivers of its more than a million and a half square miles of territory, it gains in depth and force as it proceeds in its ever-onward rush to the ocean. It is estimated that more than ten thousand miles of tributary rivers feed the mighty stream. And more than one of those tributaries can easily outrival the Thames in length, width and volume.

Dom Diogo Cam first discovered the Congo in 1482, and, greatly daring, sailed his vessel up the mysterious river for more than a hundred miles, and left his mark, only recently discovered, on the rocks above Matadi. One would like to have a detailed record of the impressions of the first white man to do battle with the current of the Lower Congo—a current which four hundred years later was to play with ocean steamers, and, if not persuadingly coerced, was to twist them about like corks; but besides the strong current there were jagged rocks, sand-banks, and shallows (on which more than one steamer was to come to grief) which were very difficult for a vessel dependent

The estuary of the Congo is 15 miles.

on the wind that rarely blows up-river until the afternoon, and often fails when most needed.

Nearly a hundred years ago, in 1816, Captain Tuckey sailed up the Congo as far as Diogo Cam, and there encountering the Yelala Rapids, he and his party travelled overland a few miles, only to meet such disaster and death as rendered the expedition impossible. Others followed—like Owen, Hunt, and Richard Burton; but none solved the problem of whence it came, or what tribes peopled its banks. The cataract region, stretching from Matadi to Kintamo Falls, a distance of over two hundred miles, made it impracticable either to sail or steam into the interior; and the rugged, hilly, almost mountainous country, peopled with wild savages, rendered it impossible for any but a small army to penetrate its secrets.

Meanwhile, far away in the interior of the country, the great and gentle Livingstone was, in his many journeyings, crossing and recrossing its sources; and while recuperating his toil-worn frame on the Lualaba he more than half guessed that the waters flowing at his feet broke their land bounds on the western coast under the well-known name of Congo. There was an attempt, unfortunately abortive, to call the river by his name—a name truly worthy of the great river, and a river also worthy of the great name of Livingstone—a fitting memorial of all he did and suffered for Africa.

In 1877 H. M. Stanley, having entered Africa on the east, and making his dramatic reappearance on the west coast, set at rest for ever the problem of the Congo waterway. Since his day scarcely a square mile, certainly no square mile of importance, of the Congo's vast watershed has been left untraversed by a white man. Many reputations have been made in this work of exploration, and a few lost; and the toll in life and money has been enormous; but the map that we knew in our youth as the easiest to draw at school because of its great blank spaces is shunned to-day by school lads because of the intricacy of its river systems and the peculiarities of its numerous place-names.

Why was this great river ever called the Congo? In a copy

of an old map in our possession dated 1591 it is named Rio de Congo, perhaps on account of it flowing through the ancient Kingdom of Congo; but the Portuguese poet Camoens, in his *Lusiads*, canto v. 13, calls it the Zaire:

“There lies the Congo Kingdom great and strong,  
Already led by us to Christian ways;  
Where flows the Zaire, river clear and long,  
A stream unseen by men of ancient days.”

This same word Zaire is but a softening of the native name Nzadi, which obtains to this day, and simply means “the river,” in contradistinction to all other rivers and streams, which have separate names to distinguish them from each other and *the* river—the Nzadi. By the natives of the estuary it is called Mwanza; by the Bakongo folk it is known as Nzadi; by the Bateke it is spoken of as Njali—only another way of saying Nzadi; by the Bobangi just above Stanley Pool it is called Ebali; and the tribes from there to Stanley Falls know it as Loi, and all these various names mean nothing more than river. It is possible that beyond the Falls its various titles in the different dialects may still point to it as the river *par excellence*, in native talk.

The writer has a thirty years’ acquaintance with the Congo River. He has watched its many and varying moods, seen it smiling in the tropical sunshine with the kindly breezes ruffling its laughing face into pleasant ripples; and he has seen it frowning in its anger with the fierce tornados lashing it into furious rage. He has had an early breakfast and, entering a rowing-boat, has glided with exhilarating swiftness down mid-stream, and reached Banana, a hundred miles away, long before sunset; but it has taken five long, hard days with sail and oar to stem the current up-river to his home. There, by the jutting bank, abreast of Diamond Rock, with twelve strong Bangalas at the oars, his boat again and again has been driven back, baffled and beaten, when another few yards would have put it in the quiet up-current just round the point. “Fall back, massa; when we done rest we fit for try once more,” the



*By permission of*

#### BRIDGE ACROSS A SWAMP

*Rev. J. L. Forfeitt*

In many of the valleys the water collects forming large swamps. These are sometimes bridged in this rough fashion. The sticks are bound together by vine ropes. This swamp is on the road to San Salvador.





perspiring Bangalas have said, well knowing and fully appreciating the fact that to fail now meant many extra hours in rowing across river and working up the other side.

So we have “fallen back” and rested more than once, only to acknowledge ourselves defeated later, and then, like whipped beasts, we have slunk across the river and were carried by the rushing current two or three miles down-stream before we could touch the other bank. Sometimes we conquered, and directly we had made sure of our victory we have shouted, laughed, and shaken hands with each other in very exuberance of feelings.

There, off Tunduwa Point, is what is now called “Hell’s Cauldron,” perhaps a more appropriate name than the Portuguese one of “Bocco de Inferno,” where the water is constantly seething and bubbling with whirlpools like a boiling pot. There are several currents running at cross purposes in that “Cauldron”; and steamers of the largest tonnage must go cannily or they will be twirled about like toy boats. This has happened more than once, and who can be surprised at it?—for there in that narrow half-a-mile channel off Tunduwa Point more than 10,000 miles of rivers are pushing their hurried way to the sea with a ten-knot current, which striking too full the bows of the unwary steamer, turn it round with irresistible force.

What sly, treacherous whirlpools there are between the Yelala Falls and Boma! These whirlpools are constantly changing, here one minute, and, closing as suddenly as they open, they start, for no apparent reason, at another place. The water just in front of your boat looks oily and peaceful, when swiftly and without warning, a whirlpool opens under the very bows of your boat, and the boat slips down the opening—what an incalculable way down it seems to go! And you who are sitting in the stern, are thrown together in a heap. Fortunately the whirlpool closes as quickly as it opened, and your frail boat rights itself; and although you laugh it off yet your racing pulse indicates the shock you have received.

There, in mid-stream, just above Matadi, while crossing from Vivi in a twelve-oared boat, we had a whirlpool open immedi-

ately beneath our keel that turned us round and round with ever-increasing momentum, and with every rotation the water rose higher and higher, and just as we thought the next turn or two would surely engulf us, the whirlpool filled and we were riding safely on the bubbling waters. There was no laughter then; it was hushed by the almost audible beating of our hearts, as we fully realised how near we had been to the unseen and the eternal.

How fickle was the river! That you had rowed yesterday with comparative ease from Tunduwa to Matadi was no guarantee that to-day you will be able to accomplish the same journey in the same time; for, meanwhile, there has been a tremendous downpour of tropical rain—a very deluge, and the river above Tunduwa Point has risen eight or even twelve feet, and the places where yesterday you encountered a feeble resistance will to-day contend every foot of the way, and you will be lucky if you do not have to put your men ashore and be towed, if possible, inch by inch round the strongest corners. These are not fanciful imaginings but real experiences.

That half-mile passage, formed by Tunduwa Point on the south bank and a jutting point above the “Cauldron” on the north bank, restrains any great increase of water from flowing too rapidly away; hence traders, State officials, and railway folk must ever reckon with these sudden rises—a full river and a tropical downpour, then the waters will be in their stores and gurgling with playful glee among the pillars supporting their bungalows and leaping over the railway lines.

The writer was living on the hill overlooking the “Cauldron” when Captain Murray brought the first ocean steamer s.s. *Lualaba* in 1890 (or was it in 1889?) up to Matadi with bunting flying. It was considered a great feat, the bringing of that 1800-ton steamer past Boma to Matadi. On that day Matadi was *en fête*. There was a champagne dinner, we heard, with many speeches and much congratulation of the captain, accompanied with a purse of gold, and, later, a pair of binoculars, which last two items were more welcome to the captain than all the verbosity of champagne speech. Since that day we

have seen three and four 5000-ton steamers lying at the Port of Matadi, thus linking the interior of wild, savage Africa with the wealth and civilisation of Europe.

From the long, hill-embroidered channel, just above Boma, the river widens out into shallows, and the water runs in smooth oiliness to the sea undisturbed by boiling, noisy whirlpools; and from Stanley Pool to Stanley Falls, a distance of eleven hundred miles, the river continually broadens and narrows; but in all that long stretch, with the exception of a mile or two at Kwa mouth, there are no strong corners to negotiate and no treacherous whirlpools to disturb the peace of mind of those who travel in canoes and boats; but there are snags to entrap the unwary.

The river, periodically rising and falling, and often whipped into large waves by the storm winds, undermines long stretches of bank, then there is a huge landslip. The earth is quickly washed away, and the top soil of vegetable deposit, with its entanglement of grass and undergrowth of brushwood, is carried down-river, and it is wise for vessels, large and small, to give such floating islands a wide berth. When they pass near to the villages the boys swim out to them, and the first to land on them will, with much laughter and boisterousness, play "King of the Castle" until stronger lads deprive them of their kingdom. Trees undermined by the water topple down into the river, and while the smaller ones float away the larger ones remain, and when at high water the strong, jagged branches are covered they become a menace to the voyagers—canoes split on them, steel boats are badly dented, and more than one steamer has had holes knocked through them, or the blades of their paddle-wheels broken to splinters.

Many tribes make their homes along the banks of the main river and its tributaries. It is said that as many as 200 dialects of the Bantu language are spoken in the Congo watershed. That is only conjecture; for there is much to be done before this, or any other, number can be stated with certainty. The tribes on the main river vary considerably, from the gentle Lokeles of the Stanley Falls district, the timid and peaceable

folk of Bopoto, to the fierce, war-loving Bangala cannibals. But all are amenable to kindness, ready to be taught in school or workshop, and, greatly appreciating the comforts that European barter goods bring to them, they are willing to work laboriously for them when there is a reasonable guarantee that they will receive and enjoy the fruits of their toil.

There is enough timber growing on the banks of the Upper Congo and its many rivers to supply Europe for many a year to come. Mahogany of rich dark grain; red camwood that takes a beautiful polish; yellow wood called by the natives in one district *munke* (=egg) because its rich yellow is like the yolk of an egg; iron-wood that resists the stoutest nail and quickly takes the edge from any tool; cedars of huge girth, from which the natives have made their large canoes; the ambash, or cork wood, which the natives use for making their light stools, and the floats for their fish nets; and many others, too numerous to mention here, not forgetting the various kinds of palms that abound everywhere.

Nor are these forests devoid of life. Occasionally the leopards creep from them in the early hours of the morning and carry off any native goats or dogs that are moving about before daybreak; buffaloes, elephants, and antelopes graze in their open glades, and shelter from the storms in their dark corridors; monitors, 9 feet long, and pythons, 25 feet long, have been killed not far from the banks. The anthropoid apes wander in some districts, and the phosphorescence that sometimes appears on decaying vegetation is pointed to with awe by the natives as the "ape's fire." Wild bush-pigs frequently tear through the forest, and they are not too timid to attack their hunters, as many bad wounds prove; but their flesh needs sharp, strong teeth and much patience to extract any nutriment. Monkeys of various colours and sizes populate the trees, and with quietness of movement and quick accuracy of aim the traveller by canoe or boat can keep his crew in monkey-meat for many a day, and, should his own supplies run short, stewed monkey is not to be despised.

In the late afternoon the discordant cries of numerous

parrots are heard as they fly above the tree-tops out of gun reach; but if you are fortunate you will catch them earlier in the day, and a breakfast or dinner of parrots' breasts is something to remember. The vain, silly plantain-eaters, preening their gaudy plumage, and pridefully screeching out their own names<sup>1</sup> from the low branches of the overhanging trees, fall such easy prey to the gun that one is almost ashamed to shoot them; and guinea-fowls, which give good sport, are to be found in forest glades and native farms, and its flesh, white and delicious, is the best we have tasted in the poultry line. Fishing-eagles and fishing-vultures, hawks, kites, and falcons, demand the skill of the sportsman to bring them down. In the old days, before there were many steamers or many guns on the Upper Congo, there were frequent opportunities of sport while gliding in canoe or boat down the main channels of the river; but now the constant repassing of many noisy steamers, and the foolish firing from the steamers' decks at every living thing, when there is absolutely no prospect of picking up the game, killed or wounded, has driven the monkeys, birds, hippopotami, &c., into the quiet, narrow side channels and creeks which are only navigable in canoes or small boats.

The river abounds in a great variety of fish. Some are extremely bony, others are coarse eating, but many are of a delicate flavour, leaving nothing to be desired except a good appetite to enjoy them properly. Space would fail merely to name hundreds of species that have been examined and tabulated. There is the electric fish (*Malopterurus electricus*), that many natives will not eat because of its supposed magical powers; a small, handsomely marked, self-inflating fish (*Tetrodon mbu*), which has the appearance of an ordinary fish in its normal condition, but on being irritated blows itself out and is then covered with spines. This is probably its means of protection, for in the gullet of a larger fish it could swell out, and its enemy must either choke or expel it. Another fish

<sup>1</sup> The natives call this bird Lukulukoko. Its notes are, Kulu ! Kulu ! Kulukoko ! hence the people say, "It is always talking about itself."



(*Anabas Weeksii*<sup>1</sup>) belongs to the family of climbing perches; and the pretty fish (*Polypterus Weeksii*<sup>1</sup>) "belongs to that group of fishes which are the nearest living representatives to the type that in long-past ages was developing in the direction of an amphibian five-toed creature." Then there is the mud-fish (*Protopterus Dolloi*) which is partly fish and partly reptile, and passes the dry season encased in mud, and in a torpid condition.

This African river, only a few hundred miles shorter than the great Nile, possesses here and there small stretches of charming scenery, but taking it as a whole it cannot, even by its best friends, be called a beautiful river; for there are hundreds of miles of monotonous vistas—a line of trees and a line of water *ad nauseam*. But its waters abound in fish, its banks are clothed with huge forests of magnificent trees, and inhabited by teeming animal life; the tribes that people the countries through which it flows are interesting, approachable, and readily receptive of European ideas; and there is always the malarial fever to break the monotony of life when everything else fails to attract, or palls to the taste.

<sup>1</sup> These, and several other fish, are named after the writer of the article, and the fish sent by him and others are in the Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London.

# APPENDIX

## NOTE I

### ON ANCIENT MARKS FOUND ON ROCKS ABOVE MATADI

THE following is by Ed. Heawood, M.A., librarian of the Royal Geographical Society, and was written by him as a footnote to a paper read by the Rev. Thomas Lewis and published in the *Geographical Journal* for June 1908: "The principal part of the inscription, immediately to the right of the royal arms and cross, may be read thus: 'Aqy chegaram os navios do estratiey (?) do Rey Dom Joam ho segº de Portugall: Dº Caao: Pº Ans Pº Dacosta.' ('Hither arrived the ships of the [fleet?] of King Dom Joam the Second of Portugal. Diogo Cão: Pedro Anes Pedro da Costa.') More to the right appear other names, mostly in a contracted form, among which the following may be made out: Alvaro Pirez, Pero Escolar, João de Santiago, João Alves, Diogo Pinero (or Pinheiro), Gonzales Alvares, Antam. Of the above companions of Cão, João de Santiago and João Alves are stated by Barros (Dec. I., book iii., chap. iv.) to have sailed in the subsequent voyage of Bartholomew Dias, while a Gonzales Alvares was, according to the same authority (Dec. I., book iv., chap. iii.), master of the *S. Gabriel* in Vasco da Gama's first voyage, in which Pero Escolar also took part as pilot on board the *Berrio* (*ibid.*, chap. ii.). Mr. Ravenstein points out that a Pedro Anes was pilot in 1503 (Sousa Viterbo: *Frabalhos nauticos dos Portugueses*, vol. i., p. 39), while a Pero Annes was in Malacca in 1510. Also that a friar, by name Antonio, was left behind in San Salvador in 1491."

## NOTE II

### NAMES OF THE KINGS OF KONGO

About two years before he died Dom Pedro V gave to my colleague, Dr. Bentley, a list of six kings who preceded him on the throne. It is not possible to state with any certainty the commencement of the reign of the first king; but allowing an average reign of twenty years to each, it takes the first king back to 1738—this, however, is no more than a guess.

1. *Nezuji*. 2. *Ndondiki* (= Henrique). 3. *Kafwasa*. 4. *Ndongalazia* (= Dom Garcia) *Nenkanga Mvemba*. 5. *Ndondele*. 6. *Ndondidiki*. 6. *Ndom Pedro V, Elelo*, who is the one mentioned in these pages. He began to reign in 1858, and died on February 15, 1891, having reigned thirty-two years. Dom Pedro was succeeded by his only direct nephew, Dom Alvaro Agwa Rosada. The nearest after him in the old King's line was a boy, Lelo, but he was in the Protestant school, so the Residente sent him to the coast to be educated. He has never been brought back, "and (in 1913) is now postmaster somewhere in Angola." Dom Alvaro was followed by Dom Henrique Nteye Kenge, who was only a Regent (supposed to be *Guarde Cadeira* for young Lelo); but when Kenge died Mbemba became Dom Pedro VI, who was a member of the same clan as Pedro V, but the relationship is hard to trace. The Portuguese Residente passed over one of known relationship and chose this Mbemba, one of doubtful origin, as he served his purpose better. He died a few years ago, and was succeeded by the present King, Dom Manuel Martino Kiditu, who is known to the present Portuguese republican authorities as *Chefe Indigena*, but to the people as *Ntotela*=king. Since 1888 a Portuguese Residente has lived in San Salvador, and he has modified the method of making a king since the death of Pedro V in 1891.

## NOTE III

## LIST OF KINSHIP TERMS

Father . . . . .	<i>Ese, tata</i> <sup>1</sup> .
Mother . . . . .	<sup>2</sup> <i>Ngwa, nengwa, ngudi, yaya</i> , when addressing her <i>mama</i> .
Brother, elder . . . . .	<i>Mpangi</i> .
Brother, younger . . . . .	<i>Mbunji</i> .
Sister . . . . .	<i>Nsanga</i> .
Sister, elder . . . . .	<i>Mpangi</i> .
Sister, younger . . . . .	<i>Mbunji</i> .
Husband . . . . .	<i>Nkaza</i> .
Wife . . . . .	<i>Nkaza</i> .
Son . . . . .	<i>Mwan</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>eyakala</i> .
Daughter . . . . .	<i>Mwana ankento</i> .
Father's father . . . . .	<i>Nkaka kise</i> <sup>3</sup> .
Father's mother . . . . .	<i>Ngudi kise</i> .
Mother's father . . . . .	<i>Nkaka</i> .

<sup>1</sup> *Tata* is also a term of respect used by slaves to masters, by wives to husbands, as well as by sons to their fathers. <sup>2</sup>*Ngwa* and *ngudi* are generally descriptive of maternal relatives. <sup>3</sup>*Kise* (from *csc*=father) is for paternal relationship.

Mother's mother . . .	<i>Nkaka.</i>
Father's brother . . .	<i>Tata.</i>
Father's sister . . .	<i>Tata.</i>
Mother's brother . . .	<i>Ngudi- or ngwa-nkaji.</i>
Mother's sister . . .	<i>Ngwa, eyaya, or ngudi.</i>
Father's brother's wife . . .	<i>Ngudi.</i>
Father's sister's husband . . .	<i>Mpangi, or tata.</i>
Mother's brother's wife . . .	<i>Nzadi.</i>
Mother's sister's husband . . .	<i>Ese, tata.</i>
Father's brother's son . . .	<i>Mpangi a kise.</i>
Father's brother's daughter . . .	<i>Mpangi a kise.</i>
Father's sister's son . . .	<i>Mwana a kise.</i>
Father's sister's daughter . . .	<i>Mwana a kise.</i>
Mother's brother's son . . .	<i>Mwana.</i>
Mother's brother's daughter . . .	<i>Mwana.</i>
Mother's sister's son . . .	<i>Ngudi mpangi.</i>
Mother's sister's daughter . . .	<i>Ngudi mpangi.</i>
Son's son . . .	<i>Ntekelo.</i>
Son's daughter . . .	<i>Ntekelo.</i>
Daughter's son . . .	<i>Ntekelo.</i>
Daughter's daughter . . .	<i>Ntekelo.</i>
Wife's father . . .	<i>Ko, and ko-njitu.</i>
Wife's mother . . .	<i>Ko-njitu.</i>
Wife's brother . . .	<i>Nkweji.</i>
Wife's sister . . .	<i>Nzadi.</i>
Wife's sister's husband . . .	<i>Mpangi.</i>
Husband's father . . .	<i>Ko, njitu, and tata, ese.</i>
Husband's mother . . .	<i>Ngudi.</i>
Husband's brother . . .	<i>Nzadi.</i>
Husband's sister . . .	<i>Nzadi or nkweji.</i>
Husband's brother's wife . . .	<i>Mpangi.</i>

This list of kinship terms was given to me by a man of good intelligence, but it would not be accepted by all the natives, for both on the Upper and Lower Congo I have found the same difficulty in procuring a list of terms that would satisfy all, or even be accepted by the same person six months afterwards; and this arises not from a desire to deceive, but is rather illustrative of the vagueness of the terms used to describe the relationship.

It must be remembered that all relationship is on the mother's side, and with the exception of the father, no paternal relationship has any force. The maternal relatives in a general sort of way, both male and female, are called mothers (*ngudi*) or elders (*mbuta* from *buta*=to beget); and the other wives of one's father are *ngudi zansakila* (= minor or junior mothers). The children of your maternal uncle are spoken of as yours, and you are spoken of as their father; but, the children of your maternal aunts, no matter how old you are, or young they may be, regard you as their child. The word for family is *yitu*, and for a relative is *yutu*. In the neighbourhood of San Salvador *mbunji*=younger brother, and *mpangi*=elder brother; but in the Ngombe Lutete district *mpangi*

is used for both younger and elder brother. *Nsanga* is the word employed for sister, but there are no distinct words for elder and younger sisters; however, *mbunji* and *mpangi* are used as a rule in speaking of one's sisters, as the sex would be known to the person to whom you are speaking, or *mbunji a nkento*, or *mpangi a nkento* might be used to one ignorant of the members of your family. *Nkento* means female.

## NOTE IV

### TIMES AND SEASONS

Besides the four names for their markets, viz. *Konzo*, *Nkenge*, *Nsona*, and *Nkandu*, which have given their names to the four days of the Congo week, there are names for various seasons that divide the year into eight parts, viz.

*Sivu*, the cold season at the beginning of the dry season, commencing about May 15.

*Mbangala*, the dry season, little or no dew, July to middle of October.

*Mpiaza*, grass-burning season, latter part of July, August, and September.

*Masanza*, early light rains, latter part of October, November, and December.

*Nkianza*, short dry season, most of January and early part of February.

*Kundi*, nsafu fruit season, end of February to May.

*Kintombo*, heavy rains. March and April.

*Nkiela*, time when the rains cease, from beginning to middle of May.

It will be noticed that these overlap each other somewhat, but they are near enough for a primitive folk who are not particular to a day or a week in their reckoning.

*Nlungi Konzo* means this day (Congo) week, i.e. next Kongo market day; and *Konzo mole* = two complete sets of markets, i.e. eight days. This time or season next year is *nlungi Sivu*, or using the name of the season at the time of speaking. When speaking of years the word *Sivu* is sometimes used, but more often *mvu* = season, and to make it more sure *mvu amputu* = white man's year. The European week is gradually displacing the Congo week, and names for the seven days are: Sunday, *Lumingu* (Portug. *Domingo*); this is often used for week, and *tumingu tuole* = two weeks; Monday, *Kiezole* or *Kiassekunda* (Portug. *segunda feira*) = second; Tuesday, *Kietatu* = third; Wednesday, *Kieya* = fourth; Thursday, *Kietanu* = fifth; Friday, *Kiesambanu* = sixth; Saturday, *Satade*



(Eng.), but more often *Kiansabalu* (Portug. *Sabado*). The word *lumbu* (= day) is understood before each term. A large number of natives are using European calendars and learning the names of the months, and use them in their transactions with the white men in writing letters, agreements, &c.

## NOTE V

### THE CHIGOE OR JIGGER

In the early sixties of last century a sailing vessel from a South American port put into St. Paul de Loando on the south-west coast of Africa. The vessel was in ballast, but on receiving the offer of profitable freight, the captain was about to throw the ballast into the sea, when he received peremptory orders from the port authorities, not to throw the ballast overboard, but to discharge it on a sandspit in the harbour. That unfortunate order has caused unparalleled inconvenience to many thousands of people, and death to some few; and will continue to inflict suffering on many generations yet unborn, who, in days to come, will tread the roads, the market-places, and dusty squares of Equatorial Africa.

That sailing vessel had picked up its ballast from the Brazilian coast, and consequently it was impregnated with chigoes (*Pulex penetrans*), an insect that looks and hops like a flea, the female of which burrows into any handy flesh in which to lay its eggs. From St. Paul de Loando the pests have gradually spread by the trade routes to San Salvador in Portuguese Congo, and from thence over the whole of the Lower Congo. Over the trade routes they travelled in the feet of the natives, and in the loads they carried on their heads and shoulders. In later years they found their way by canoe, boat, and steamer to the towns lining the banks of the Upper Congo, and in more recent years to South-east Africa, from whence they have been carried to India by native troops returning home after service in British East and South Africa. When they first arrived in San Salvador they were called rubber (*ntandandangwa*) because the rubber traders brought them from the coast, and the insects bounded about like rubber.

The female chigoe is not over particular in her choice of a "nest" for her eggs, so long as it is fleshy. Hence the paws of dogs are full of chigoe sacs, and that animal spends its spare moments in biting its paws, not only to allay the itching, but in the hope of pulling out the irritating things; and there is no greater kindness a person can show a dog than that of extracting

these pests from its feet. The combs and wattles of fowls are generally full of chigoes, and also the feet and snouts of pigs. They also find their way into the fingers, elbows, and buttocks of crawling children, as well as into the feet of adults.

The female chigoe burrows under the skin, and she rapidly swells as her abdomen is full of eggs, and as the eggs mature the sac formed round them increases in size to that of a large pea, when it bursts, throwing out the eggs into the fine dust of the village paths and market-places. There in the hot sun they hatch quickly, and soon the dry dust is full of bounding chigoes, that cling to the legs of the passer-by, be he white or black, and finding their way to the feet, they explore first round the toe-nails for a suitable place to enter, and failing that they extend their search to other parts of the feet. If the one upon whom they alight, in their blind jumps about the open space, happens to be a white man, then they use their best endeavour to find an entrance between the laces of the boots, or by some other way, to the toes of the unfortunate person, where they set up a most persistent itching.

When the itching begins, it is wise to call the best "chigoe boy" on the station, and giving him a clean needle, let him hunt among the toes until he locates the creature and carefully pulls it out. Then dip the eye of the needle in pure carbolic and insert it into the chigoe hole, thus thoroughly cauterising it. Should the sac have formed to any size, the boy will loosen the scarf-skin around it until he is able to extract the sac whole and unbroken; and then the place must be cleansed with carbolic, or bad ulcers may come, or blood-poisoning, which has caused more than one death. Whatever the phrase, "You be jiggered" may mean in England, in Africa it is about the worst thing you can wish anyone.

In those parts of Congo—from one to two degrees north and south of the Equator—where there is more or less rain all the year round, the chigoes are not so plentiful; but farther south of the Equator, where there is a dry season of fully five months, the chigoes have every opportunity of breeding in quantities in the fine dust, and cause annoyance to everybody. Chigoes not only enter the flesh, but where, through laziness or carelessness, they are allowed to burrow in all the toes, they give off a most offensive odour, which, on very hot days, becomes almost unbearable. A decoction of tobacco water, about a pint to a pail of water, sprinkled every morning during the dry season over the living-house floor, the school-house, or the store before sweeping, will drive out any chigoes lurking in the dust, and will thus render those places more tolerable. If the floors are of boards then the tobacco water can be put in the water with which the floors are washed, with beneficial results.

## NOTE VI

### NATIVE DISEASES

In the chapter dealing with Black and White Magic many of the diseases from which the people suffer are there mentioned in describing what the witch-doctors are supposed to cure. Like other members of the human family, the natives suffer from aches in various parts of the body, ulcers, pimples, rashes, soreness of gums, toothache, colds, coughs, catarrh, sprains, sympathetic buboes, various kinds of sores, &c., the children from diarrhœa, convulsions, fits and fevers from teething, &c. But the more serious complaints that trouble them are as follows:

Inflammation of the spleen . . . . .	<i>Bekele.</i>
Goitre . . . . .	<i>Dingadinga.</i>
Craw-craw . . . . .	<i>Kinkwada.</i>
Ophthalmia . . . . .	<i>Ebumbulu.</i>
Intestinal worms (species of ascaris) . . . . .	<i>Ediongololo, nseta, nioka a moyo.</i>
Bladder worm . . . . .	<i>Kinsukulu.</i>
Scrotal hernia . . . . .	<i>Edungu, mpiki, nkukulu.</i>
Hematuric fever . . . . .	<i>Kaji.</i>
Fever, ague . . . . .	<i>Mvuka.</i>
Boil, a gathering . . . . .	<i>Evumbu.</i>
Large abscess . . . . .	<i>Etaza.</i>
Squamous affections . . . . .	<i>Kwiji.</i>
Stye in the eye . . . . .	<i>Luntujia.</i>
Scald-head . . . . .	<i>Mbanda.</i>
Dysentery . . . . .	<i>Makulu.</i>
Constipation . . . . .	<i>Mfinga.</i>
Yaws, in children . . . . .	<i>Mata, nkuba, nkubi.</i>
Venereal nodes and sores, <i>mbadi</i> ; and this same word is used by the natives to describe elephantiasis and polypus, and seems to indicate any excrescent growth.	
Epilepsy . . . . .	<i>Niangi.</i>
Paralysis . . . . .	<i>Evola.</i>
Scarlet fever . . . . .	<i>Nkankatu.</i>
Asthma with much wheezing . . . . .	<i>Nswengenia.</i>
Dyspnœa, painful breathing . . . . .	<i>Ekomongo.</i>
Chest complaints, pleurisy, &c. . . . .	<i>Luvati</i> =rib where the pain is felt.
Beri-beri . . . . .	<i>Ntonji.</i>
Leprosy . . . . .	<i>Waji wambunduna</i> , mild form, not contagious.
Smallpox, <i>xika</i> : been several epidemics during last thirty-five years. I caught it in 1889 somewhat severely, while attending the natives.	

Sore throat . . . . .	<i>Kwayala.</i>
Rodent ulcer that destroys the nose ( <i>lupus exedens</i> ). . .	<i>Matamba.</i>
Blisters between toes . . .	<i>Niania.</i>
Vertigo . . . . .	<i>Zunga.</i>
Protruding navel, umbilical hernia, very common . . .	<i>Ekumba.</i>
Sleeping-sickness . . . . .	<i>Manimba.</i>
Scrofula . . . . .	<i>Ebunze.</i>
Dropsy . . . . .	<i>Sulu.</i>
Madness . . . . .	<i>Lau.</i>
Whitlow . . . . .	<i>Balu.</i>
Sores on soles of feet . . .	<i>Nzeko.</i>
Albino . . . . .	<i>Ndundu</i> , very uncommon.
Blindness . . . . .	<i>Umpofo</i> , very uncommon.
Deafness . . . . .	<i>Fwa matu</i> =dead ears. Total deafness is very rare.
Dumb person . . . . .	<i>Ebaba.</i>
Baldness . . . . .	<i>Vandu.</i>
Stammerer . . . . .	<i>Nlokoso, nkokomi.</i>

## NOTE VII

## A LIST OF NATIVE REMEDIES

The following are the names of native remedies known to and used by many before they apply to witch-doctors to perform their ceremonies. This list I procured from an intelligent native, about forty-five years old, who often used them on his family and neighbours without requiring any fee, and he had quite a reputation for "home remedies."

1. *Nsele-nsele*, a root, good as a purge. Clean the root, take the skin, and crush it into a powder and dry; take enough to cover a sixpence. It is very bitter and strong. Chewing the leaves is good for diarrhœa; also masticated leaves put on a cut stops the blood. An infusion of the astringent is good as a medicinal bath. This is also used as an abortive when taken as a purgative.

2. *Nkenge a kiasa*, a poisonous shrub. Take the bark of the root and rub into a paste, and apply to painful place. As a poultice it is used for drawing out blood, &c., much the same as a blister.

3. *Nsunzu*, a big tree. Take skin of root and boil. The mouth is washed several times a day with the liquor for sores in the mouth.

4. *Mwindu*, small tree. Take bark of tree (very red when cut), bruise it, and soak all night and drink the water in the morning. Good for dysentery.

5. *Mbota (lonchocarpus)*. Take leaves and boil them. Drink half a glass of the liquid for killing intestinal worms.

6. *Ntundulu* (guinea grain). Take roots, pound and soak all night in water. For dysentery, for any aversion to food, and also a wash for inflamed eyes.

7. *Sakwa*. Very big tree. Take bark, crush it, soak all night, and drink a glass each morning for dysentery.

8. *Mbangu-mbangu*. Take bark of tree, pound, soak, and drink every morning a glass for diarrhœa; and for pains in the back (*nsaku*) through weakness. Rub into a paste with oil to make an ointment, and rub on body for weakness or general debility. It has a smell like turpentine.

9. *Ntontoszi (Briophyllum calycinum)*, or "tree of life." Press the juice of some leaves into a twisted-leaf funnel and a little water, for washing out bad ears.

10. *Nguba-amputu*. Tree bearing a nut. Take piece of nut, pound, and mix with salt and pepper or an egg. It gripes and purges.

11. *Mamau* (limes). Leaves for intestinal worms. For an adult take ten leaves, pound, and mix with water; drink the clear liquor, which is very effective. The juice of the fruit mixed with powdered iron-stone and soot, well boiled and stirred and applied to yaws, said to be very good. This second preparation is called *Kongo a nkela*.

12. *Luasu*, shrub with thick leaves and yellow flower like a daisy. Leaves are good for yaws in babies. Leaves pounded or burnt and mixed with water as a wash for sore gums, but No. 3 is better.

13. *Dimbuzu*. Creeper. Crush the leaves, boil in water, and drink half a glass every morning, or take as a clyster for diarrhœa, or pains in the stomach.

14. *Mavolo* (=charcoal), used for indigestion and bad breath. A very old remedy.

15. *Dinioka-nioka* (=little snake). Take a small quantity of the juice of the leaves for intestinal worms.

16. *Mwanji a lolo* (called *kienga* in Ngome Lutete). Take root, bruise, and boil. Drink some of the bitter juice. Good for stomach-ache, also a good diuretic, and is used by the natives for inflammation of the bladder (*kaji*). Sometimes they boil three roots together, *nsunzu*, *nlulu*, and *lolo*.

17. *Diza (Euphorbia)*. Used as a purgative, but very dangerous.

18. *Ndondo-londo*. Strong creeper. The skin of the root is chewed for diarrhœa, and for sore throat.

19. *Kintamba*, shrub with tuberous roots. Extract juice from roots by pounding and mix oil with it, and rub on painful place. For a person lacking an appetite, pound and boil the root and drink the liquor.



20. *Ngadiadia*, big tree bearing a large pod containing a nut. Masticate a piece of the nut for stomach-ache.

21. *Nanazi*, unripe pineapple, good for an outbreak of rash on the skin called *kintuntu* (perhaps measles). Sometimes unripe pineapples and manioc leaves are crushed together and rubbed on the body for this rash.

22. *Lulongololo*, very thin marsh withy. The roots are boiled and liquor used as a purgative.

23. *Ndiadia*, thick grass with nodes. The pith from the heart of new grass is put on a fresh cut. It is painful, but the cut heals quickly. This pith is also used as food.

24. *Ewele-wele*, marsh grass with sharp edges. Pound the stem and boil. Drunk as an aperient, or used as an enema for clearing out the bowels.

25. *Sama* = brown ants' nest. Eaten by pregnant women, also by children for intestinal worms; and is used also by men for very bad diarrhœa.

26. *Luvemba* = chalk, mixed with salt and worn in a horn round a mother's neck, and, if her infant vomits, she frequently licks the chalk in the horn. Chalk and worm-casts are mixed and used by medicine-men for dropsy (*kibwaka*).

27. *Lengo-lengo*, a small tree. A decoction of the bark is good for scald-head.

28. *Elonga* = bath. To give a patient a medicinal bath, a hole is dug in the floor of the house and the sides are plastered with mud, and lined with plantain leaves. The hot water is poured into this hole, with medicinal leaves, &c., and the patient sits in it, or over it, with a large cloth or blanket over him and the hole "to keep the medicine in."

Cupping (*sumika*) is practised very freely; and they know the use of the clyster (*tuba*).

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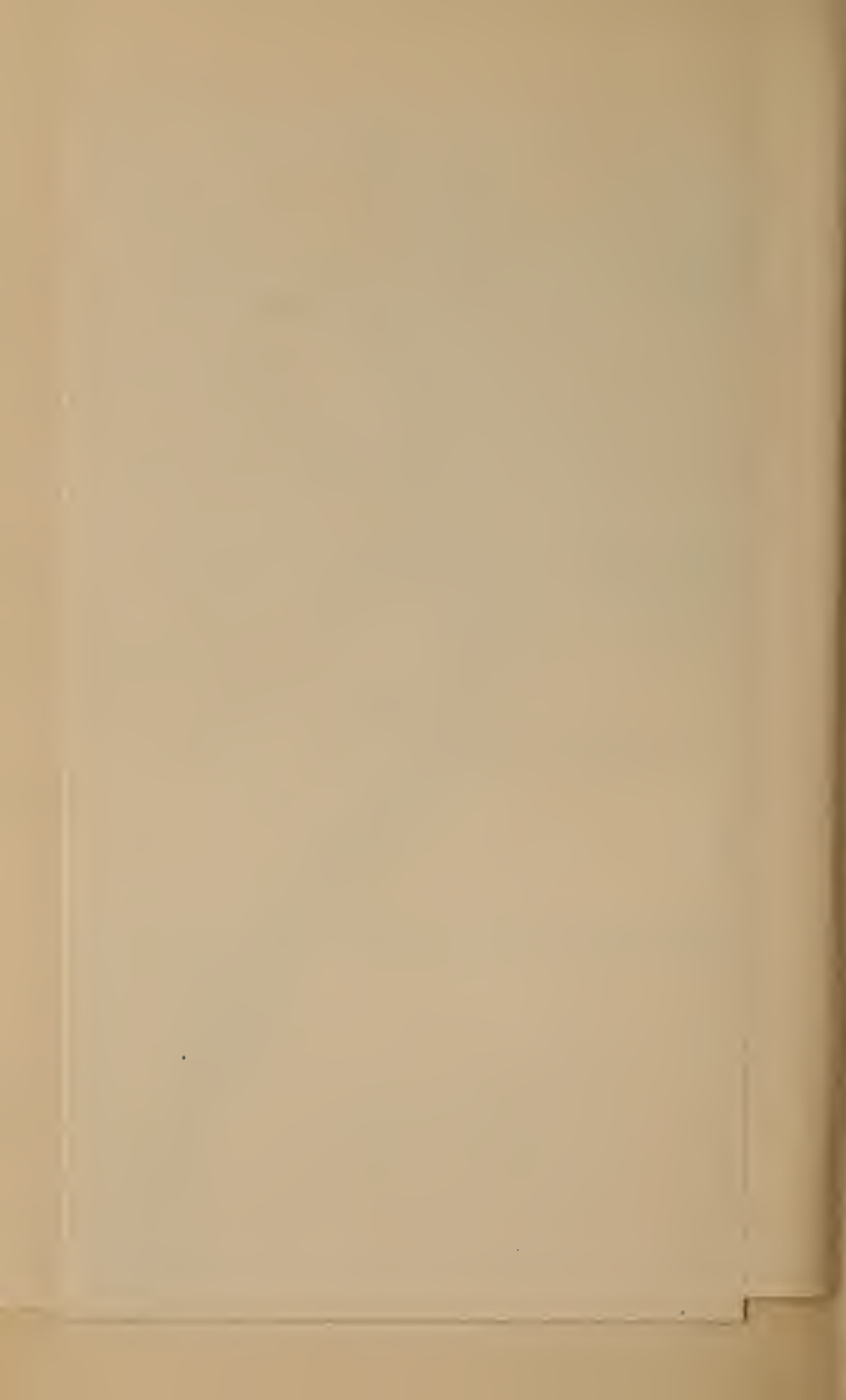
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# MAP FOR AMONG THE PRIMITIVE BAKONGO.

















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